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INDIAN JOE, THE GUIDE;

OR,

THE WHITE SPIRIT OF THE HILLS

A SEQUEL TO "BEN, THE TRAPPER."

BY MAJ. LEWIS W. CARSON.

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INDIAN JOE, THE GUIDE.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY.

"WAKE up, man! The bears will be after you before you know it."

The speaker was stooping by the side of a rapid stream, shaking by the shoulder a man who lay there asleep. The person who spoke was a young fellow in a hunting garb, with a rifle in his hand and a knife in his belt. His frame was strong and well made, his face manly, and his general appearance prepossessing. The man at his feet, who did not wake even when the hand was laid upon his shoulder, was one of whose nationality there could be no doubt. He was a Dutchman, having the marked characteristics of his people. He had a rather good-looking, indolent face, and, as his eyes at last opened lazily, as the other shook him roughly, considerable cunning was displayed in their depths.

"Vy you shakes me, den?" demanded the sleeper, in an injured tone. "I nefer done nottings mit you."

"Wake up, then."

"Vake oop! vake oop! Vy shall I vake oop unless I wants to? Now, see here: you coes avay now—right now, vile I dalks mit you. Shpose you no go avay yoos now, I vill get oop unt preak your het mit mine goon."

"Oh no," said the young hunter, laughing. "I don't want to quarrel. But you are not safe here. I should really dislike very much to see a nice, good-looking fellow like you, gobbled by a grizzly bear. Don't take any chances on sleeping out in this way, without a guard."

"A crizzly pear! Vat is dat?" demanded the Dutchman.

"That is one of the most savage animals on the face of the earth," was the reply. "The strength of a man is nothing when once he falls into his hug. Strong! That is not the word. Nothing can describe his strength and ferocity."

"I dinks I don't vant nottings to do mit crizzly bears," said the Dutchman, rising. "Vell, who are you, anyvay?"

"My name is Daniel Crowley," replied the young man.

"Vat you do?"

"I am out on a hunt in company with a party of trappers and guides. Will you join us?"

"Vell, I don't care. I cooms avay from St. Shoseph, in Missouri, pecause efery von is so particular off a man don't bay somet'ings mit de government efery dimes he sells a class of lager."

"Then it appears that matters not unconnected with the excise question sent you out on the plains."

"Yaw; I vas mat mit eferypoty, unt so I gets my gun ut dinks I vill co mit Californy. Vas it a goot vay off, you dinks?"

"A good way! I should think so: a trail a thousand miles long, through the desert and prairie, haunted by Indians who do not know what mercy means. What is your name?"

"Yost Hoppen."

"A good handle, that. But come with me. You are well armed, and a few weeks' hunting and fishing will do you good. And, when we go back to St. Louis, you can return to St. Joseph, and sell beer with more regard to the excise law."

"Yaw," said Yost. "But, shoest look at dis: ven a man drinks lager peer he drinks him for his own bleasure, eh?"

"Certainly."

"Vell den: vat bleasure is dere in drinking peer ven you can't drink it unless some Common Council or udder say you may? Gootness cracious! it makes me so mat ash nefer vas, sometimes, ven I dinks how I've peen dreated."

"Never mind that now, Hoppen. Out here you can drink little except the pure spring-water, such as you rarely get in smoky and dusty cities. Beer, after all, does not satisfy thirst as good cool water does."

"Vater!" said the other, in a tone of intense disgust. "Yankees drink vater, unt don't care for peer?"

"A great many of them don't," replied Daniel.

"Den a creat many off dem are vools!" snorted the Dutchman. "Vat I not likes coot peer, vat foams from a panel

like snow, unt runs down the throat like oil, so creazy unt coot? Vy, I nefer sees how a man can lif mitout peer. I don t know how I does mitout it here."

" Now, I want to ask you a question, sir. Some people pretend to say that a man can't get drunk on lager beer. I never drank any, so—"

" Goot Lort!" ejaculated Yost.

" What is the matter?" said Crowley.

" Nefer trink any lager peer?" cried Yost.

" No."

" Nefer in all your life?"

" Not a glass."

" Den I vonders ash. you pe not deat; now vile I talk mit you. Nefer trinks any lager peer in all his life! Gootness cracious! dat ish so funny."

" I was going to ask you a question," said Crowley. " There are those who say that people can not get drunk on the stuff they call lager beer; others say you can. What is your opinion?"

" Vat you call him?—shtuff?"

" I beg pardon—the drink called lager."

" I dels you vat I dinks. Dere ish no delling off a man could not drown himself mit lager, yoost de same ash he might do mit vater. Now den, lager ish not made to *swim* in. Vater ish petter vor dat. Lager ish made to *trink*. Off a man sits town, unt trinks his *deux* or tri-dozen classes off lager, it vill not hurt him. I nefer trinks more ash vorty mugs mineself."

" Is that all?" said Daniel, laughing.

" Dat ish not mooch. A man nefer ought to make a hog off himself."

" That is true," said Daniel, repressing a strong inclination to laugh. " Come along. We may as well go to camp."

Yost shouldered the rifle which had lain at his feet during the conversation, and followed the speaker.

The stream on which they stood ran through a beautiful prairie-land, spread out before them like a great map. In the distance, the lofty peaks of the mountains could be seen. The prairie, in the hunting season, is one of the most remarkable sights ever seen by mortal eyes. Daniel Crowley was

lover of nature. His dark eyes rested approvingly upon the beautiful landscape, and he drew a long sigh of pleasure, and turned to his Dutch friend for sympathy. As he did so, he laughed outright at the expression of his face. He had been studying for some time on the wonder of a man who had lived to the age of twenty-five, and had never tasted the delectable drink called lager.

"Nesfer trinks lager peer in his life! Goot gracious, vat a man!"

Crowley had his laugh out and then walked slowly away up the stream. He had not gone very far from camp, and in fifteen minutes they entered it together. There were four men in all. Two of them were the ordinary trappers of the northwest, clad in buckskins and moccasins. Another was a half-breed, a well-known guide over the hunting-grounds west of the Mississippi. A tall, nobly-formed man, with a keen, restless glance, showing the Indian blood in the elasticity and grace of every motion and in his swarthy skin. He wore the ordinary dress of a hunter and guide. Near him, whittling at a small piece of wood which lay in the hollow of his hand, and whistling in a loud key, sat an individual who was a character in his way. A sandy-haired, lank, lean-visaged fellow, in a greasy suit of buckskin, "tattered and torn," like the man in the old melody. He had a sharp, inquisitive eye, and a face nearly as dark as that of the half-breed, from constant exposure to the wind and sun of every locality. He cast a droll look at the Dutchman as he came up.

"What hev ye got thar, Dan?" demanded the greasy man. "I'll bet every cussed pelt I git this season he's a Dutchman."

"Keep quiet, Jeff Rooter," said Dan. "Don't meddle with my protégé."

"Yer—which?" yelled Jeff. "Oh, good gracious! Git me an ear-trumpet, so that I kin catch the sound of that ar' word. Proto--ha! ha! ha! Oi, Dan, ye'll be the death of me."

"I'll give it to you right under the ear if you don't keep quiet. This man is going to join us. Use him well."

"Wait a minit, mister city man," said Jeff, suddenly assuming an expression of dignified anger. "What mout that last remark of yours signified? Say it ag'in, an' say it slow.

Didn't I hear some remark 'bout givin' it to some one under the ear?"

"I think you did," said Dan. "This man is under my protection, and he shall not be troubled."

"That's a big word. Which ear mout ye prefer, Mister Crowley?"

"Don't bother me, Jeff. You can't quarrel with me, if you keep your own side of the fence. But, if you get over on mine, it might make a row. Now be civil. Don't mix yourself in with this man. I want him well used."

"Whose a-hurtin' of him; say?"

"Nobody," replied Dan. "And I propose to see that nobody does."

"Oh. Yer a sort o' gardeen of his'n. Now look hyar. I ain't a quarrelsome man, I a'n't. But I kin go through any man, big or leule, old or young, the younger an' spryer the better I like it, thet goes to put on style over me. Yes sirree. I ain't nothin' but a little cuss, but thet thing I kin do. Which way will ye hev it? Nip an' tuck, square hold, side hold, or with bare fists? Any way you like. So's yer suited, I ain't partic'lar."

"A truce, Jeff. You and I have no right to quarrel."

"Then let Dutchy take his own part," grumbled Jeff.

"Vat you mean by dat?" said Yost, who had been measuring him with his eye for some time. "Vhat you want mit me?"

"For heaven's sake don't talk to him now, Yost," said Dan. "Keep quiet."

"Let me spoke a few dimes mit him," said the Dutchman, quietly. "He spoke at me good many dimes, unt I no says nottings. I'm not afraid mit him. He dalks too much mit his mout."

"Keep back, every man of ye, while I thrash the ground with a Dutchman. Git out of the way, 'cause I don't want to spatter his blood an' bones an' brains all over yer good close. Now, Dutchy, hadn't ye better say yer pra'rs?"

"Vat for?" said Yost, who did not seem in the least frightened. "I nefer says my brayers mit te daytime. Vat ya goin' to do?"

"I'm goin' to wipe the ground with yer karkidge."

"Vat for?" asked the Teuton, in the same tone, his arm swinging lazily by his side. "Vat I done mit you?"

"You've got to be 'nitiated," replied Jeff. "I'm the man to do it. Once pay yer entrance an' it's all right. But, the time has come. Git ready. I'm goin' to wrastle ye down."

Jeff rushed forward and fastened on the Dutchman by the shoulder and elbow. Yost never made a struggle, but stood like a rock, smiling calmly at the efforts to overthrow him on the part of the greasy hunter. Jeff got very red in the face.

"I'll wrastle ye down ef I die," he panted.

"Off you do, unt I find it ous, I vill t'row you over der moon," said Yost. Jeff Rooter tugged and strained, without any perceptible effect on the equilibrium of the Dutchman.

"Go avay," said the latter, getting weary of the sport. "You can't do nothings mit me. Dake avay your hands."

"I'm goin' to throw ye, anyhow," said Jeff, continuing his struggles.

"I dells you vonce more, go avay, ven I dells you."

"I won't."

Yost put out his long arms and grasped the speaker by the shoulders. One effort of his powerful muscles, and the feet of Jeff flew into the air and his body was deposited on the greensward ten feet away. He was on his feet in a moment and grappled his antagonist around the waist. The first throw had been such a surprise to him that he did not have time to put forth the skill he really possessed in wrestling. He was now on his guard and had his favorite hold. The left arm of Yost was thrown about his neck and his right hand grasped his wrist in an iron clasp. For five minutes they danced up and down upon the turf, and then, to the surprise and joy of every one, the heels of Jeff Rooter suddenly flew into the air, as he went over the hip of the Dutchman. Derisive yells greeted the fallen hero, as he rose slowly from the grass.

CHAPTER II.

THE GREAT AMERICAN PARTRIDGE.

Jerry was at first inclined to be angry. But, at the letters in his bravado, there was a real admiration for a spirit'd act, and, before the laughter had subsided, he extended his hand and shook that of the Dutchman warmly.

"That's right, old man," he said. "I like a man with pluck, anyhow. Ye throwed me, sir an' square. I don't say ketball a'na' it. Let's be friends."

"S'posest ush you like," said Yost, returning the cordial pressure. "I never like to quarrel mit no man. You pes very strong mit your arms. Von times I thinks I could throw you, but another dan's I thinks you could throw me. Wat you do ous here anyvay?"

"We ar' on a hunt," said Jerry. "That young chap come out after us after deer, grizzly an' bison. I've told him that ain't much sport by ar, 'cause the redbreast is thick ez all, an' spiled bacon. Howsomer, off he didn't arn't, I ain't goin' to tell to be, 'cause it's the life I lead every year. Much of a shot, you?"

"I pes a Texan," said Yost, who did not quite understand him, or else, with the sly humor peculiar to him, was desirous of puzzling his new friend.

"Oh, shoo up. I know, can you fire a rifle?" said Roster.

"I vives mit you deak or three times. I pes' mail mit firearms," said Yost, with a sly look.

"Kin ye hit anyt'ing with a shotgun? You carry a shotgun, I see, an' if ye kin't shoot, 'tis a pity to have it throwed away. Let's try a shot."

"I thinks I can do it mit this v'gentleman," said the Dutchman. "Is he a good shot? Don't he pes kill?"

"Don't be afraid. Let me have it, ye."

"No," said Yost, laying a protective hand on his rifle, "I loads him nine-oh. Off you loads him, you puts in too much powder. Dat ish nix good."

He loaded the piece awkwardly enough, and they looked about them for something to shoot at. At this moment, a pair of turkey-buzzards, attracted by some offal which had been thrown on the grass, alighted about three hundred yards away, and began to feed.

"That's a chance," said Jeff, eagerly. "Try yer hand at them birds off thar."

"Vat?" demanded Yost. "Dey ish too far away. I can nix shoot dem."

"Yes ye kin. 'Tain't a foot more than three hundred yards. Try them once't. I know a man thet kin ha' a rifle straight kin fetch 'em every time."

"Perhaps I can nix holt him straight. Some times I holt him straight, odder times I holt him more crooked as I der duvel. Off a man vas haf deux pair of eyes, can he hit dem pirds. You shoot."

Jeff raised his rifle to his shoulder, took a steady aim, and fired. One of the birds sprang into the air and fell dead; the other rose aloft. As he did so, to the surprise of every one, Hoppen brought his rifle to his shoulder, took a quick aim, and fired. As the smoke curl slowly upward, they saw the bird, with closed wings, falling swiftly to the earth. Yost dropped his rifle and threw up his hands in astonishment.

"Gootness cracious! I vas hit de phad nix nite can!" he cried.

"Didn't you think you could hit it?" asked Dan, curiously. "It seems to me you meant to do it. That shot was done like an old hand in the bushes. Tell the truth, now. You know all about a rifle."

"Off course I knows all about a rifle," said Hoppen, negligantly. "You takes de little gun, and puts in some powder. Den you puts in some paper, and drives it in with a rammer. Den you puts in a pellet, and drives it in with a hammer. Den you puts on a cap, and cocks fire. Den you looks in yez unt vues it off, and then it goes off and it kills. Dat is a vat you toos. I know dat very well."

"It must have been a chance shot ye know," said Jeff, "'cause thar ain't many of us on the prairie could hit a buzzard at three hundred yards, let alone on the wing. You didn't mean to kill him, I know."

"Dat ish von lie," said Yost, calmly. "I means to kill him pad enough. Dere ish a cool many tings mit dish life vat ve means to do, but ve can't always do it. Vat ve toos mit der pird, now ve has shot him?"

"Eat him, of course," said Jeff, winking at his companions. "Didnt ye know that this yer is one of the best birds on the plains?"

"Nix," said the Dutchman, shortly.

"I'll go and get it for ye," said Jeff, with surprising good-nature. "Ye must be tired and hungry too, seein' ez how yo' lev walked a good ways. I'll cook it for ye, too."

"Vat you says? You cook dat pird vor me?"

"Yes," replied Jeff. "I wouldn't for any other man."

"You very good. Well, go and get him."

Jeff walked off hastily, after making a signal to his friends to say nothing, and soon returned carrying a buzzard in a gingerly manner, as if he did not care to touch it more than was necessary. Nothing would have induced him to touch the filthy bird but the desire to play a practical joke, for which these men are famous. The rest looked on smiling, though Dan was determined not to let the joke go too far.

"Vere ish your gun?" asked Yost.

"Shot all to pieces," said Jeff. "That's a powerful good gun of mine; a mighty good one, you bet. Can't often ye find a better one. That gun kin kerry a ball jest fifty mile. It kin shoot a thing jest ez far away ez a man likes to strain his eyes to see. All he's got to do is to hold it up to his shoulder, p'int it at the obj'ct, an' pull the trigger. If that ain't sartin death, raise my ha'r."

As he spoke, he was busily employed in pulling the feathers from the buzzard, with a curious contraption at the base of the nose which was not to be seen by Hopper. The task was done at last, and a final touch. In a moment the bird was skin and feathers, laid over the gun, carefully attended to by the busy hand who had the joke of making a Dutchman eat a buzzard ready. Dan looked on in silence. At last he spoke:

"Did you come out here without a gun?"

The Dutchman turned a quick, long look upon the face of the speaker before he answered. There was a lurking suspicion

in the dark eyes, and Hoppen thought twice before he answered.

"Nein. I cooms ons from St. Slesyph mit a goot horse. Put ons dere py der river he shtrays away but I can fix him. I looks vor him all von day, unt ven I gots th' horse, I lays down unt goes to sleep. Ven I wakes up, ven I sees a dog me mit your hant, unt dellin' me off I was. I git away, an' folks mit me, der pears would eat me. I wakes up den. I was not want to shlay dere any longer. I goes 'tall mit der pears."

"It is a great pity you have lost your horse," said Dan. "Luckily for you, we have a spare one which you can ride. I take it for granted you know how."

"Yaw, I rides some."

"Let's git up a little game," cried Jeff, forgetting the buzzard as he saw an opening for a gambol. "Let's show Dutchy how the Indians make a moccasin out of bark."

"Come, come--" began Dan. "Don't go to sleep."

Jeff took his arm and led him aside. "Look you, capt'n. You must be a little keenul. Frontier man will have to tr'm. Taey mrist, you know. Now, we won't git to leut the Dutchnan a bit. I like him. He's a right good feller at bottom, an' if he turns these little moccasin us, he won't Part 'em from some one that will sell 'em to 'em. You can't how to make a moccasin you as I think yo'?"

Dan laughed. "I believe I did," he said. "Very well. Go ahead, only don't be hard on him. I will see and fit him of service before we get to the end of our trail."

"That's just the idea, capt'n. He's got to fit the ways of the woods, an' he won't as well Part 'em as any other co."

They went back to the fire, and Jeff clattered into the fire, if his "kit," which was the only piece of glass he had, fit well with what appeared to be a piece of flat bark, about six inches wide and a foot long.

"See byar, Dutchy."

"My name ish Hoppen; Yost Hoppen."

"Jerusalem, what a hant! A hant! S--byar. The m'shies of yore is gitten worn out in the trail."

"Yaw, I pees very hard on m'le sclasses," said Yost. "I

wear one more schoons ash would make a man so rich wat never was. If I could only make mine own schoons I should bee very glad."

"Ye kin ef ye want to," said Jeff. "It's mighty easy. I make mine, so do all the rest. Let ain't got wives out hyar. Look at that moecasin. I seen it ain't got no right to wear a plantation like that under yon out hyar on the trail. No he ain't, by gracious. Anybody could feller the trail ye leave, by followin' along the tree. Ye arter w'ar moecasins?"

"I thinks dat is drue," said Hoppen. "Pat how ter tuyvel will a man wear moecasins wen he no moecasins had? I can nix make dem."

"I'll teach ye how."

"Will you? Dat ish good. Dat ish better ash goot? I likes you more ash efer. Show me, den."

"Come hyar," said Jeff, laying the piece of bark he had on the ground. "Lordy. It's easy ez goose-grease. I've Parnt a durned good many how to make moecasins, Indian fashion. I'm what ye might call a P'anthropist. Durned ef I think ther ought ter be any sech words in the English language. But ther is, an' that will be. Pat yer foot on that piece of bark."

Hoppen obeyed and placed his right foot on the bark. Jeff stepped and pretended to arrange his foot. But he did not get it in the proper position.

"Move it a little more th' way," said he. "That's right. A litt'l more weight on it. That ain't enough. Lift up yer other foot. I want to git yer measure."

Hoppen did as he was bid, and the heels of the Dutchman struck hard in the air, and his head struck the prairie grass with a dull thud. The whole thing was a trick. The bark, instead of consisting of a single piece, in reality contained two, fitted together nicely and coated with a grease on the inside. The moment the victim consented to lift his foot from the ground, the upper piece is jerked suddenly away and in spite of his struggles, the victim soaks his mother earth. Hoppen struggled up, but not quickly enough, it seemed, to see Jeff set the two pieces together again.

"What ar' ye thinkin' about in that way fur, you?" demanded the guide, in a rising anger. "I'd a most got yer measure when over ye went."

"I dakes mine own measure," retorted the Dutchman. "I dinks some von bushes me down."

"No sirree. Ain't nobody teched ye. Come along and git yer measure, or ye don't git no moccasions from me."

"You show me how, den," said Yost. The party gathered about them, and Jeff proceeded to show how it was done.

"Ye put yer foot on it so," he said, placing his moccined foot in the proper position, "an' lift the other foot in this way."

"How you does him?" demanded Yost, coming nearer. "Do him again."

Jeff again placed his foot on the bark and lifted the other. Yost was very near. Bending forward suddenly, he gave a quick tug at the bark. The biter was bit. Down went Jeff amid a hearty peal of laughter, the second which had greeted his downfall that day. He sat upright with a comical expression on his face and shouted:

"Thar I is, kerwhop! An' I took the lint jest ez I teched the grass. He did it cute, too."

A new roar of laughter greeted the confession. Jeff rose, casting a puzzled look at the Dutchman, whose face was as stolid and expressionless as ever. Dan thought he detected a cunning twinkle in his blue eyes. But, the impression was gone in a moment.

"Durn me ef I don't think there's more in the Dutchman than he lets on," muttered Jeff. "Never you mind. I'll ketch him yit. He kain't always fool old Jeff. He knows his biz on a raft."

With these words he sat down at the fire and again turned his attention to the buzzard, which was cooking with anything but a savory smell. The men moved farther out of the circle of the flame, holding their noses.

"I dinks I smell somethings," said Yost, sniffing at the air, like a war-horse.

"No ye don't," replied Jeff. "Don't git that lime into yer head. You don't smell nothing."

"Yaw. I pees sure I smell somethings mit mine nose," answered Hoppen, again elevating that organ. "'Tis fix good, wat I smells."

"Oh, don't be foolin'. Nobody else smells nothin'. Do ye, boys?"

"No," said one of the men, who had been holding his nose and breathing through his gaping mouth for fifteen minutes. "Darned ef I smell a thing."

"Course ye don't. That. The bird is done," said Jeff. "I don't s'pose I'll git any thanks fer my trouble. I'm always a-doin' somethin' thet I don't git no pay fer. It's jest my way. No ceremony. Take it on the stick."

Yost took the bird cautiously, holding it at arm's length.

"Wat you call him?" he said.

"That? Posside you don't know the name of the great American partridge. That's cutiss. I never thought no man could be so fur behind the times ez that. That's the American partridge."

"He is a pig pird," said Yost.

"He is that; a durned big bird. Yer in luck, old man. Tain't often ye git sech a animile ez that all fer nothing; cooked too."

"Tain't right vor you to do all the work vor nottings," said Hoppen. "I knows better ash dat. I helps you mit some off der pird. Dere: dake der creat American partridge, unt eat him oop. I shmeells him too mooch mit mine nose."

"You don't mean to say thet yer gwine to make me lose all my time thet ar' way?" said Jeff. "Seems to me ef ye didn't want the bird ye mout'a' said so."

"I gifs him to you. Wat you mat apout? Dat ish nice pird."

"Of course," replied Jeff, with a doubtful look. "That ain't no nice. Eat a piece."

"I ain't hoongry myself. I nefer vas hoongry dis night. I gifs him to you; eat all you vant."

The grin which had been getting broader every moment, suddenly broke out into a loud guffaw. Jeff looked round upon the circle of grinning faces with any thing but a pleased expression. But the humor of the thing at last affected him. The grin became reflect'd on his own face, and, breaking into a laugh he threw the buzzard at the head of one of the guides, who was laughing loudest, and shook Hoppen heartily by the hand. From that hour they were warm friends, and proved so to each other in many a trying situation.

CHAPTER III.

THE MIDNIGHT MESSAGE.

DAN CROWLEY took his place on guard that night, as his man came. His companion on the watch was the half-breed, Joe Lane. This remarkable man was at one time well known in the section traversed by the two rivers of the Northwest, and Hudson Bay Companies as the Three Brothers or the Red River. He was very taciturn, and it was a remarkable thing that he should choose for a companion a man like J. T. Rector, who was a continual and untiring talker. But, they had been friends for many years, and had traversed the country in all its parts. Now you would hear nothing at the Three Brothers; but they would be traversing the treacherous river and snow south of Hudson's Bay. The men often made long and wearied journeys, to which the magazine journeys are mere cakewalk's play. Over icy waters by the side of turbulent lakes, living for days without food, eating with ravenous appetites a fish or snake which fortune threw in their way, and then again all in a morn ing a cheerful temper, which would have cheered them even in a dying hour.

If the histories of such men could be once sought out and written, what a record of hard labor, of devotion to the cause of friendship, of steady bravery in the hour of danger, their story would show. It is the duty of the world and the writers of every class to remember in the depths of their bosoms as far as possible of the story of a race that is to be grand in many of their characteristics.

"Do you think it probable that we may meet, I asked Crowley.

"Perhaps. Good night, Joe, and God bless you the tall now. Go out to hunt, and carry with you a few of their blankets. All same. Bad Indians. Chief killed up at Snake river one day. Bad Indians, but the Blackfeet like him. See how it is? They like any bad man. Same Indian, myself; some white. But my white blood stronger?"

Reared for the greater portion of his life among the tribes, Joe had never been able to get over their sententious mode of speech. He was a curiosity as he sat there, with his elbows on his knees, and a long, reed-stemmed pipe in his mouth, putting out columns of smoke from his nose, a habit acquired among the savages.

"It would strangle me to smoke in that way," said Dan, laughing.

"Learned it among the Crows," said the half-breed. "Like it now. The Crows are the best tribe. Like the Nez Perces too. The Comanches and Arapahoes are thieves and murderers. Got to look out for them, or you will get into trouble. Blackfeet jus' as bad."

"I expected danger here. Some young fellows rather like it. I do, at any rate; and I think you like it too."

"None of our boys will flinch. Been on trail long time. Jeff talk great deal in camp, but, when time comes, keeps his mouth shut as well as any man. Good man, Jeff."

"What do you think of the Dutchman?"

"Don't know yet. Study him," said Joe.

"You think he needs study, then?"

"Yes. Shoots well; foiled Jeff; wrangled him down; cool do that."

"We will keep an eye on him. Is he asleep?"

"Yes, so. If he good man, glad to have him. Very strong."

"He is indeed. I wonder what he meant by falling asleep by the river?"

"One eye open, p'raps," said Joe. "Lots of men do that. Wait! Get your rifle. See any thing out thar?"

The night was clear and still. The moon was up, and a few wisps of smoke fell upon all around. A hundred yards away they saw something move slightly. The next moment a figure appeared on horseback, and was off like the wind. Joe sprang to his feet, and ran after it with leveled rifle. But he did not run, not knowing what day, or the report of a rifle might bring upon them. Dan followed him on a run, and they reached the spot where the figure had stood. Standing white fluttering near the ground attracting Linie's attention, he stopped and took it up, and found it to be a small piece of paper, attached to a stick thrust into the ground.

"Ha!" said Dan. "What have you there?"

"Looks like a letter," said Joe. "Read it; ain't a scholar myself!"

Dan took the paper, and found it written in a female hand. Lifting it in the moonlight, he made out the words.

"Go back to your homes. Danger is about you on every hand—danger which will end in your destruction. I have warned you. Beware!"

Looking at the half-breed in the moonlight, Dan saw that his brown face had turned a little pale.

"I don't understand this," he said. "Do you, Joe?"

"Yes," said the half-breed. "It is the White Spirit."

"The White Spirit?"

"Yes. Something haunts the Lills. Comes in the night to camp and warns people back. If they don't go, some of them, and sometimes all, are killed before many days. Came to me once near this very spot. I was out with Jeff Rector and two others. The Spirit came and warned us. In two days the other boys were robbed and murdered. We took the hint and dug out."

"Have you ever seen the figure?"

"Only at night, as we saw it now," replied Joe.

"The White Spirit certainly writes a very pretty hand," replied Dan, smiling. "I see you are a little infatuated with Indian superstition, Joe. If this were a spirit, there would be no occasion to resort to the very earthly process of writing letters. If there had been a postscript or two, I should have thought it was a woman."

He turned the paper over again and found a little more writing.

"I am your friend; I would save you. I pray you, go away."

"There it is," said Dan. "It is a woman."

Joe looked sullen. "Perhaps you want to say now: I never see it. Come often, tell you. Jeff has seen it. Always in moonlight. Gives some sign of danger and runs away."

"Don't it seem a little curious that a spirit has a house?" asked Dan.

"Don't believe me. Wait; stay here and lose your scalp. May if you want to."

"Don't get angry, Joe; I mean no harm. But, I am not to blame if I do not believe in spirits. I was taught the other way. Shall we wake the rest and tell them?"

"Do you mean to stay?"

"Certainly; I mean to have my hunt out."

"Then keep still; don't tell. All guides leave you if they hear you see White Spirit. *They* believe; *they* know. Seven times the White Spirit come down from the hills. Seven times the camp is full of sorrow. Some man dead; sometimes all. Their bones bleach in the sun because they would not take warning, like you."

"Would you have me run away like a coward? We came out here to hunt."

"If you not afraid, neither be I," said Joe. "Go back to camp. Keep your letter."

"I'll bet you the price of a new rifle I see and speak with your White Spirit before we leave the foothills."

"Speak to it! You crazy, I guess."

"Dare you bet?"

"Speak to it. You die! No man look spirit in the face. There are spirits in the rocks and trees, and they hear the words you say. They will carry your words to the White Spirit!"

"Let them carry as many of my words as they like. But, if I do not see and speak with this White Spirit before we return, I will make you a present of my rifle. You have often said it is a good piece."

"And if you do, I will give you ten prime beaver-pelts. That's agreed."

They went back to the camp. As they approached it, they saw some one moving back on his hands and knees. At that distance, it was impossible to say who it was, and when they arrived at the camp, every man lay wrapped in his blanket, half-silently unconscious of any danger. The Dutchman especially was snoring in such a way as to awaken the birth of Dan. The performance of a new beginner on the frontone was nothing to it. A gurgle, a g-sp, and then a rolling snore, formed part of each bar of the concerted piece he was performing upon the instrument which had "selected somet'ing" wrong in the turkey bazzard.

"Who was it that left the camp just now and came in before us, Joe?" said Dan.

"Don't know. Thought it was Dutchy. He sleep pretty sound."

"Yes."

"Don't you think he sleep too sound for so early in the evening?" said Joe, in a slightly suspicious tone.

"I never should have thought of that," said Dan. "No I don't think there can be any doubt as to the reality of that snore."

"All right, perhaps. I don't know. Don't talk to me. I want to think."

Through all that tedious night-watch the half-breed never spoke to his companion, but sat with his head upon his knees, smoking in that old way of his, and apparently plunged deep in thought. As the morning came, the men began to stir, and Jeff rolled lazily out of his blanket, with a start and gasp. Yost was still snoring.

"Dinna ye hear the pibroch?" said Dan, winking at Jeff.

"What's the pibroch?" said Jeff.

"The Scotch bagpipes."

"Bagpipes? It's a swill barrel. Hark to him, boys. Hear the Dutchman tune his fiddle. Oh, gall-ey, didn't it just splendid! If I ain't channel, damn me traxell. Give him a dig in the ribs, Joe."

The half-breed did as desired, and Yost sat up with a rumpled head, stretching himself, and distorting his visage in an odd manner. Some of the party laughed.

"You besser look a little closer, wat you do? I is der heaviest sleeper mit America. Yaw. Dar is not such a ush von feller wat kin sleep so long wat I can."

"Were you not up during the night?" asked the young man, looking at him keenly.

The face of the German did not change. "Up. Yaw. I was up. I was up in der dark. I was asleep."

"You are sure of that?"

"I never was sure mit my times," replied Yost. "I live town here unt den I forgets veller I was asleep or not. I never wakes oop to see."

"You are a wit, I see."

"A vit? Vat ish dat?"

"You make jokes."

"Shakes? I never makes a shake in mine life. A shake? Ven I talks mit you, I talks trut'. Nothing but trut'. So I tell's you."

"Ungh!" grunted Joe. "No more talk. Get ready. Off this morning."

"Where we gwine at now, Joe?" asked Jeff Rector.

"Higher up the foothills. Git some place where we safe. Guess we find a place, eh, Jeff?"

"You bet ye! Is Dutchy comin'?"

"Spese so," said Joe. "Just as he likes."

"Yaw," said Yost. "I does mit you. I never likes to shoo' em late mit ter pears. I will shoot a pear some day hit mine cun."

"I reckon ye kin," said Jeff. "I mind how ye shot that tur' buzzard."

"Great American partridge," said Yost. "Yaw. I shoots him."

Rector looked prettily foolish. He had hoped that Yost would forget the name he had given the turkey buzzard.

"Why yes," he said, sheepishly. "We call 'em turkey buzzard out hyar sometimes."

"Well, dat ish not so goot name. I call's dem great American partridge."

"He calls you, Jeff. You may as well own up. Get out your horses, boys. Happen, yonder is your horse. The man with the white star in his forehead. Look out for him. There is no better horse in the foothills when you are once in trouble, but he is hard to track."

Yost approached the man with a halting step. The latter drew his ears back viciously and uttered a defiant snarl. Any judge of a horse would have been on the alert for either kick. The Dutchman did not seem to pay any attention, with the rein dangled out his long neck and made a savage lunge at him. Happen, with extreme agility, acted a counter upon his name, imitating the posture of the father of evil, in the garden of Eden. The iron ran to the extreme length of the lariat and made two or three passes at him.

The next moment the two were down together on the green-sward.

How it was done no one could say. They saw the brawny hand of Hoppen shoot out and seize the leg of the roan, and the next moment he was sprawling on the grass. A short struggle took place, a trial of brute force and manly will, and manhood triumphed. Yet rose and the man lay trembling at his feet. The Dutchman touched him with his foot and he rose and stood panting. Hoppen threw on the saddle-cloth, put on the saddle, looked at his teeth, tightened the girths, and sprung upon his back. They saw in a moment that he was a practiced horseman. There was another thing which puzzled Dan. This was the ease with which he adapted himself to the Mexican saddle, which at this time was hardly used except upon the plains. Hoppen seemed to know all about it, and in a few jumps over the manner of mountain men, in a way entirely different from the manner of the old school of horsemanship.

"Where did you learn to ride?" asked Dan, as the party rode away beside the shining stream. Hoppen looked up with an odd smile. There was something so curious in it that Dan felt more and more the conviction that this man was not what he seemed. But, the first word he spoke were so transcendently Dutch that he was immediately assured of his suspicions.

"I learn mit St. Shoseph. I lives ons of town, mit a vurn. I keeps goot many horses. I never viands von I was unwill to ride."

"How did you tame that fellow? I was a little afraid you had more than your match."

"I throw him down," said Yess, smiling.

"So I saw. But how? That is a strong horse and you are not a very large man."

Hoppen stretched out an arm for Dan to inspect. He ran his fingers along the powerful limb above the elbow, and felt the muscles, hard as wrought iron.

"You are very strong."

"A little. I throw Jeff away. Now look. He is a man; he drags man, put he fool too much. Get him a horse. Where you goes now?"

"Into the mountain, to hunt for the beast known as the Indian devil—the Careajou. I hope we may find one."

"Neser see von?"

"No. By all accounts, they are not the most lovely thing in the world to tackle. But I want one, and I'll have him."

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAIN PATH.

THEY left the plains behind and entered the passes of the hills. On either hand rose rugged cliffs, with low growths of pine and spruce upon the sides. A gloomy place. Dark shadows fell upon the path they trod, from cliff and pine tree overhanging it. In some places the road was so narrow that they were forced to advance in Indian file. Joe rode in front. Dan followed, next to Jim Yost. The two guides and Reeder brought up the rear. They were a strong and well-appointed body of men for that region, and men whom a band of savages would have hesitated long before attacking. Their knives and pistols were of the most approved manufacture, and any one of them could hit a man with a rifle-ball at six hundred yards.

"We never know this hole, Jeff," said Joe, looking back at his comrade. "This is the place where we lost two of our boys. Never understood how it were done."

"'Twas the White Spirit," said Jeff. "You know it were, Joe Lane."

"So it was," said Nat Parrel, one of the guides. "I never heard of that. The White Spirit haunts these hills. I don't like it overly well."

"Nor I neither," said Jim Arnold, the other guide. "Say, Jim, I s'pose you couldn't find no other place to hunt only here?"

"Didn't Dan say he wanted to track a careajou? I only ask you fair, Jim Arnold. Do you know any better place to look for the Indian devil? Say, now?"

"No, I don't," grumbled Jim. "But I don't like to ~~face~~ the White Sperrit."

"No more do I, Jim. But, we must have the cash. Didn't Dan say that if we took one, it would be two hundred dollars right in our fists? Ain't that something?"

"All right, Jeff. Never thought of that. What's Sperrit to you? Whose afraid? I ain't, for one. That's fifty dollars apiece. If I git that, an' I ever hold him up in an' old sledge, I won't back down now. I didn't tell you that. Now you bet?"

"Them keerds will be the death of you yet, Jim An' I. Don't I know you? As soon as every man git any money in your fist, what must you do but go your paces on him and calculating to fill. You kin't alles do it, and if you do, some body will be sure to draw a flesh hand and then what's your kings and, eh? I don't say nothing agin' keepin' them. They's a providence to us trappers and gillies. Like as not we would git into some diviltry if it wasn't for an honest game of poker or old sledges. But, let me reason, Jim?"

"I don't reckon that's any man that's up for the money o' Jeff Rooter kin kick me at heidis. I calculate I'm the best poker-player in this hentry. Yes, I do."

"All wrong, Jim. All ye know of heidis I tell ye. Ye know that?"

"Don't lie now, Jeff. I kin kick any man that's up for a better player than any of the Rooters family, father or son."

"That means ye kin kick me, don't it? Just jump off that mule and scuttle for me credit. You don't know me, I reckon. I'm the great Prayharry I'll be. I'm the greatest lawman o' the Rocky Mount. You've bin told about me that took a bad fall by the tail and turned out to be blind agin' a fine stamp? That's what I tell ye I'll be."

"You don't say?" muttered Jim, clutching his hand to his heart and staring at the little to the right of his shoulder. "I'm the Alabam' Gump, and the I-ll-R-ll I'm called, an' on no man. You took an interest in me, didn't you? That's all I say. You took an interest in me, didn't you? That's all I say. That's all I say, that ain't. Did you ever see me pull up a tree by the roots? Oh, git down."

Jeff was off in a moment, but Hoppen jumped down and catching the two men by the breast, held them at arm's length, in spite of their struggles.

"Kill the damned Dutchman," roared Jim; "what business has he to interfere with white men?"

"You 't you keep still, or I knocks your heart aginst der rock," replied the Dutchman, coolly. "Coom, coom. I'm not afraid mit you. Keep still. What you want to fight for?"

"Didn't he call me a liar?" roared Jeff, struggling to get away. "I want his scalp. Wahoo! Yip! Let me git at him. He deserves to die."

"He said he could beat me at poker, he did," shouted Jim.

"I knocks your hearts to geller off you don't keep still. Now you listen mit me. Off you broncise me not to fight mit each udder, I let you co."

"This is sheer nonsense, Jeff," said Dan. "I am ashamed of you."

Jeff began to be a little abashed now that his anger began to cool. "I didn't got nuthin' ag'in' Jim," said he. "But he didn't call to crow over me, kez he?"

"I only awheit to do," said Dan. "Let it rest until you get back to St. Louis after this trip, and then play aginst each other. But don't fight."

"Good enough, old man," said Jeff. "I agree. Do you, Jim?"

"S'chuck!" said Jim, extending his hand. Their little difficulties adjusted, they became better friends than ever, and for hours they rode side by side through the mountain passes, where it was wild enough, but that of their exploits in those regions, Hoppen listened with a quiet suffice. Dan, who had been keeping him up to this time, rode up to and entreated him to come along with him. He found, under the pale glow of the German, a man of native cunning and shrewd good sense, but he did not seem astonished, however, when he had seen and done that day, and the evening before. Jeff was a little wistful about Jim. The ease with which he had kept up with him and the other guides had a good deal to do with his giving him a high opinion of their strange companion's physical strength.

The party passed through a narrow defile in the mountain and entered upon a verdant table-land, a thousand feet above the level plain which they had quitted half a day before. At this moment a clear, sweet voice called them to a halt. Turning in surprise, they saw a woman standing on a great rock a hundred feet above them, leaning upon a small rifle and looking down at them. A glorious woman! Her hair, unbraided, was lifted by the passing breeze, and swept in waving coils about her symmetrical form. Her dress was a sort of tunic, and a sash of the same material was thrown over her shoulder and knotted at her waist. Her feet were small and clad in dainty boots, slashed and embroidered in a fanciful manner.

"Where do you go?" she cried. "Halt there. I would have speech with you."

Astonishment kept them silent. Such a vision as this, appearing to them in the midst of the savage scenery, seated on a great rock, might well surprise them. Dan was the first to find his voice.

"You ask us where we are going with the air of one who has a right," he said. "We are going on a hunt."

"Turn back then, while there is yet time," she said. "I warn you back from this terrible place, as I have warned many another. If you take my advice, it shall be well with you. The prairies are broad enough for us all. Leave to those who claim it the right to patrol these passes, as they have done for years."

"Others claim the pass, then?"

"Yes. They are not the ones to warn you back. That is my office. If you are foolhardy enough to keep on, after what I have said, you do it at your peril."

"We accept the peril, and refuse to go back, unless we know what we have to fear. You see the men I have with me. They are not the ones to go back with a rear guard. You must give them to us."

"Other men have acted as you do," replied the girl, with an angry flush. "I have no more to say. I leave you to your own devices."

"Stay," said Dan, as she turned to go away. "A word before you go. Was it you who sent us the warning last night?"

"Ask no questions, for I will answer none. You have marked out your own course. Walk in it, if you will. For my part, I have done all in my power to save you. But, you will not be saved. Go your ways and I will go mine."

While she held them in conversation, Jeff Rooter had ridden forward at a quick pace. As she turned to go away, he suddenly appeared beside her on the rock and seized her in his arms before she could use the rifle.

"Loose your hold, rascal. How dare you touch me?" she cried.

Unheeding her words, Jeff raised her in his arms and descended the cliff rapidly, while Dan called out to him angrily to let her go. Shortly after he appeared among them, panting for breath, and holding her firmly.

"There," he said, letting her feet rest upon the ground and still holding her hands. "Now you've got her. Make her tell what she means."

"Release her, Jeff," said Dan, pushing his companion back. "How dare you insult a woman?"

Jeff released his hold and she stepped back with leveled rifle, looking angrily at the party.

"I am here," she said. "What do you want with me?"

"Nothing," replied Crowley. "You are free."

"Thank you. I know you, Rooter. I will teach you better than to lay hands upon me. It is well for you that you held me, or I would have shot you down like a dog. No one ever yet touched Mail Marin in anger who did not regret it at some time."

"If you let her go, I won't be responsible for the result," said Jeff. "She kin be made to tell you what you want."

"Dat's right," said Yo-ti. "Make her shpeak. Vat right I have to woman to hold her tongue? Vip her, ef she won't shpeak?"

"Be silent, fellow," replied Dan, in high anger. "Believe me, miss, this rudeness was not intended on my part. I acted for myself and for my men. A moment's thought will convince Rooter that he is wrong."

"I know him well enough," she replied, "although he does not know me. I will never forget this insult on his part. Am I free to go?"

"Certainly," replied Dan.

She turned to go away, but came back. The generous behavior of the young man had touched her, and she wished to do something to repay it.

"I wish you would take warning," she said. "There are dangers here of which you have no conception. I have seen, and of which I can not speak. I would do it if I could. It ought to be enough for you if I warn you that these mountains are fatal to all who enter them."

"We are grateful to you for your interest in our welfare, but we will not go back. If you know these from whom this danger is to come, let me warn them. We are not men to be trifled with and I will not submit tamely to be trifled or murdered. Let them remember this."

"You will not be warned. Farewell, then, and when the time comes, remember that Maid Marian warned you in the Robbers' Pass."

She turned, and darted up the rocks with the agility of the mountain goat. Upon the summit she paused and made them a mute gesture of farewell, which was full of dignity and grace. The next moment the rock was vacant, and the party stood dumbfounded, gazing at the spot where she had stood.

"Now let me ask why you didn't keep the dame I warn?" growled Jeff. "You see if trouble don't come out of it."

"Don't let me see you take half of a lady in that way again, Mr. Rooter, while you are under my orders."

"Oh. You don't say! A lady, too! That devil say she knows me. I don't know her. But, if you deaf wi' you'd kept her for a safeguard, then my name ain't Jeff Rooter. Come along."

CHAPTER V.

A NEW-COMER.

THEY made a camp in a scalloped pass among the mountains, not a mile from the spot where they had seen the mountain man. Jeff Rooter was the leading spirit of the camp, and the other guides naturally looked to him for advice, unless he assumed too much, when they at once asserted their own dignity, after the manner of bee-trappers and guides.

"There's a man in these yer regions I'd like to lay in the camp, if he could be got," said Jeff, one day, as they came back from a deer-hunt. "He's the best man among us. None of the boys are at all afraid to allow that old trapper Ben is the boss."

Yost drew near with an appearance of interest, which did not escape the attention of Dan, who was watching him closely.

"Trapper Ben?" said Dan. "Who is he?"

"Ben Mann is his name. He's tramped these plains time out of mind, an' that ain't a man between Larimore and the Colville they don't know him. He's been a Crow chief in his time. That ain't all. He hates Blackfeet like death, an' he reckons it's his duty to see that nobody is wronged by 'em or their dogs. I wish he was hyar."

"Do you know where to find him? I would pay him well to join us."

"I don't know where to place him just now. Last time I seen him was up on the North Fork, trappin'. There used to be flocks Lar-tin-roan-les hyar, but they ain't nigh a' out there yet. I don't reckon you'll object to letin' the boys work for themselves when they ain't hanterin' for you?"

"Not at all," said Dan.

"Because, if they kin pick up a little somethin' by their-selves, aside from what you pay 'em, it's so much cl'ar gain. The ground ain't nigh so good ez 'twas me't, but it ain't

quite bad. Thar's han'some pelts to be got by them that's thrify."

Yost took to the work with unusual aptitude, which awakened the suspicions of Jeff Rooter more and more. His success was something almost wonderful. It was rather early for trapping, but the nights were very cold, though no snow had fallen as yet. Besides two or three pairs of *liver-spots*, Yost secured a number of martins and mink, and several other skins.

But the Dutchman had an enemy who was more than his match. Nearly every day one of his traps which he had set in a favorable place, was dragged out of the water and its contents devoured. It was no human thief who did the deed, for they would never have torn the skin into shreds and patches, and left the bones scattered on the ground, gauged clean of flesh. The thief was partial to that particular trap. Not a day passed but Yost suffered loss both in his pockets and morals. For every beaver lost caused him to swear terribly, a habit which was fearfully developed in him. He told his troubles to Jeff Rooter, and the old guide went out with him to view the ground.

"I know what it is," said he, looking at the scattered remains of a fine beaver. "Only one animal c'd hav the heart to do it."

"Vat is it?"

"It's a wolverine, an' no mistake," said Jeff. "I'll bet money a wolverine knows more than any man in this camp."

"Vat ish a wolverine?"

"Don't you know? It's one of the darnest things ye ever saw in the shape of an animal. Small! Godd Lord, they'll beat a Blackfoot, chaw me into inch pieces if I s' won't. The darnest critter! How many times hav she cleaned out yer trap?"

"More as seven dimes, so help me craddie," said the Dutchman.

"Yes? An' she'll do it every time that's any thing in it so long as you set a trap for beaver. Why don't ye set a deadfall for her?"

"I don't know him," said Yost.

"I'll show it to ye, then," said the other. "Durn it, we kain't be eaten up by the varmint. Show me whar she comes."

They went up the cañon about a quarter of a mile. The trap was set in a sheltered nook close to the base of a rocky cliff. Jeff laughed heartily to see so many bones scattered on every hand, the remains of the wolverine's visits at various times.

"You may laff off you wants to, Sheff Rooter. Suppose I se vash shole from you, maybe you laff t'other side off your seat?"

"I kain't help havin' a laugh about such a sight ez that ther. Don't stop me. Let a chap laugh, kain't ye?"

"Dere!" cried Yost. "He's peen here ag'in. Look at my trap."

There indeed was the article in question, pulled up out of the water with the hind legs of a fine beaver sticking in it, the result of the last raid.

"Oh cracious to goodness!" cried Yost, "vat a sight ish dat for mine eyes to see. I dinks dat ish worse nor any t'ings vat I sees. Dat pever vash te pig seller vat I dries to get be'ng. Ach, mein Gott! Let us catch dat wolverine unt Sina shall cook him, unt so help me cracious ush I vill eat him."

Jeff showed him how to do the work, and he set about making a deadfall. In an hour it was done. He wanted to stay and see the wolverine come into the trap, but the trapper would not let him do so.

"Don't ye try it," he said. "The cunnin' varmint kin kin a man half a mile off, easy enough. Ye kain't think how much they know. A man ain't got any chance with them, 'cause they won't come within gunshot unless they're very hungry. Tain't off'n we kin git a wolverine. Come to y. I ain't sure the deadfall will fetch her. If that is any way to git under it, or over it, she'll do it."

The bait which Yost had placed on the end of the deadfall was so arranged that if any thing pulled at it, a weight fell from the other end of the log and it dropped across the body of the trap, generally breaking its back. The trap he had was a good one, and he had great faith in its success.

During the afternoon he went up to see if any thing was in the trap. Jeff was with him. As they came near, they could see that the log had fallen.

"We've got him!" cried Yost.

"Don't be too sure of that," replied Jeff. "Ye didn't catch a wolverine every day."

He was right. When they came to the spot, they found the trap empty both of thief and meat. Too cautious to go under the log, the wolverine had gone over it, and gnawed at the meat from above. Of course the trap fell, but the thief, after eating the bait, walked coolly away. Yost was in a rage. He swore oaths which none but German lips can attain without incurring the danger of lockjaw. He called down all kinds of anathemas on the head of the unfortunate thief, while Jeff stood by, shaking with laughter.

"I judge ye ain't answerable for swearing after such a loss as that ar'," said he. "I'd swear too. But what ar' ye goin' to do?"

"I fix him dis dimes, so ash my name ish Yost H'ppen. Wait; it ish getting late. I fix him!"

He went back to camp and returned shortly with a gun and some more bait. He then loaded his gun, putting in a double charge of powder and a hand of lead. He then climbed a tree and suspended the gun from the boughs of the kariat, in such a way that a pull on the string would discharge it. To the muzzle he attached a piece of meat, in a tempting manner.

"Dere!" he cried, contemplating his invention with great pride. "You see wat ish done. Pampye G'les we come, gakes holt off'n de m'at. Pept lang! See he is over. Dat ish goot. Yaw!"

"That's a good trap," said Jeff. "I judge that will fix him right eternally. If it don't, I'm a liar. Let's go back to camp."

They did so—Yost looking back bravely at his invention, and declaiming loudly in relation to its merits. On the way back they stopped at such of their traps as lay between them and camp, and took out the spoils found there. Just had just taken a fine beaver from a trap, when he heard the report of the gun they had left.

"Thar she goes!" he cried. "Anyway, yer trap hez not failed to git the gun off."

"Wat you jets dat I haf not kill von wolverine?" cried the Dutchman.

"I'll bet five Beaver-pelt ag'in' a single one," said Jeff.

"I takes dat bet, Snell. I makes finif' paver skins so easy an' nothing vas. Coom; we c'esent prin's in my wolverine."

It was now dark, and Jeff did not care to go back. But he had bet, and wanted the bet decided. So there was nothing for it but to go. It did not take long to reach the place where the trap had been set. The gun no longer hung in the tree. The wolverine did not lie dead at the roots. But there lay the gun, as it had fallen.

"The c'ree varaint?" said Ben. "See what she's done!"

The animal had climbed the tree and gnawed off the lariat, letting the gun fall. Of course it went off, and before the bullet arrived up on the scene, the strange beast was away into the depths of the forest, carrying the bait which she had so richly earned.

The rage of poor Yost passed all description. As before, he dashed about, swearing his entire vocabulary of choice Dutch oaths, much to the delight of Jeff, who stood near enjoying the scene.

"This yer is too tough a c'ree for ye to manage," he said. "Let me take hold of her. I judge that thar is only one way to ketch her, an' now that she hev b'thered ye so, I'm the man to ketch her. It's an old head, too; none of yer fools of animiles, ye bet."

"Wat ye do, Snell?" said Yost, in high displeasure. "You no p'pperish I pe. You can nix catch her. She fees to mooch vor you."

"I c'ld acho not, ole man. Perhaps ye don't know me. Now snell as I an' let a feller work as knows how."

The first thing he did was to bend down a small tree to a knot with the stump of a tree which he had cut down, and fasten it tightly so that it c'ld not spring back. In the top of this tree he placed a big trap, one of the strongest he had, which happened to be set near at hand. This he baited with a choice piece of meat. When all was done, he undid

the fastenings and placed it in such a way that the moment the trap sprung and the animal caught began to struggle, the tree would spring into the air. The trap itself was so buried under the leaves that an animal, to reach the bait, must get upon the body of the tree and cross it. When all was ready, Yost accompanied the trapper back to camp, grumbling at the ill success of his last trap. Jeff said nothing.

"I tells you tish no goot," said the Dutchman. "You can nix catch her, anyhow. Don't I know? S'pose I fees a wool? Dish ish no wolverine, vat dakes mine power; dat ish all woolishness; dis ish von tuyvel, unt nothing else; dat ish vat I dinks; yaw."

"I'll ketch him fer all that," said Jeff. "Does ye know who I learned the trick from? 'Twas Trapper Ben; old Ben Mifflin, as I was tellin' ye 'bout. He's 'bout the cutest varmint ye ever see, that old Ben."

"I likes to see him."

"They say he's got a new cummerade lately—a big Dutchman named Snyder—Jan Snyder. I never see him, but they do say he's nigh about ez smart ez the old man hiself."

"Doochmans smart? You's woolin' mit me now, Slick Rooter. You nefer dinks a Doochmans ish smart."

"Yes I does; you be, fer one. But never mind that. You want to see me ketch a wolverine the way old Ben does it. You jest lay low an' keep shady; old Jeff kin do it. They kain't fool him wuth a cent."

"Do it to-night," pleaded Yost.

"No, to-morrer."

They returned to camp and said nothing about the wolverine. Next morning, quite early, they started for the trap. Jeff, much to the disgust of Yost, insisted upon stopping every now and then at his traps and taking out the captives. "He wa'n't goin' to lose his time," he said. In vain Yost begged him to proceed, for he was in a hurry to get to the top, and see if the animal was taken. At length they reached the trap, and Yost uttered a wild shout of triumph.

The top of the tree was swaying in the air, and there, dangling by one foot, hung the wolverine, her feet just brushing the earth below. It was a huge animal, and she tutted her

vicious head from side to side to catch a glimpse of the newcomers. Jeff echoed the cry of his companion and started forward on the run. The wolverine began to struggle, knowing the fate in store for it, and sent up its low, peculiar note of alarm.

"There she hangs, the cantankerous reptile," said Jeff. "Now d'ye say I kain't ketch a wolverine?"

"You did it bully, Jeff," said some one near them, in a quiet tone. Jeff looked up quickly, and brought his rifle forward, but checked himself when he saw who the new-comer was, darted forward, and began to shake hands with him earnestly. It was an old man, hale and strong yet, with many streaks of gray running through his once raven locks. The face was a peculiar one, but full of spirit, and the black eyes had fire enough in them yet. His dress was that of the trapper and guide. He carried a rifle of the most approved make, and a splendid revolver hung in his belt.

"Ben Mifflin! By gracious, I'm glad to see ye."

"Same to ye, old boy," replied Ben. "Come out with a huntin' party of boys from the towns, I judge?"

"Jess so, Ben."

"Likely to lose yer skulps, too. It beats all human natur' how resky boys will be."

"I ain't quite a boy, Ben Mifflin."

"Yes ye be. Yer a boy to me, Jeff Rooter. Oh, git out. I've tramped these pararies too much not to know what I'm talkin'. Danger! That ain't no word fer it, Jeff. Don't think I've bin asleep. I've bin a-watchin' ye, mighty clost. I knowed of danger ye didn't know nothin' 'bout. Yes I did."

"Then why didn't ye come an' tell us, Ben?" said Jeff, reproachfully.

"Teach yer grandmother, Jeff Rooter. I sorter reckin I orter know when to speak an' when to keep still. Mout be ye've seen the White Sperrit."

"How did ye know that?"

"Never you mind. Didn't it warn ye to git up an' dust? Now, why didn't ye take advice? I ain't overly fond of these youngsters thet comes out hyar so off'n nowadays. They drive all the game from the plains. Time was when I c'u'd

drop a deer or a biffer on any spot of ground I liked. I kain't do it now, an' I'm makin' to travel farther west. It's gittin' too closely settled about yer for my way of thinkin'."

"Closely settled! Jeff could not hear a smile as he looked about him. There stood the eternal hills, as they had stood for ages. The river flowed at their feet, and the trees hung heavy upon the mountain side.

"Yer thinkin' it don't look none too much like I'm settled about yer. Melbbe it don't look so to you, but does to me. I've seen the day when to see a white man in this region twice a year would be a wonderful thing. Talk so now. An' besides, that's more lyar than you think."

"Who be they?"

"I ain't goin' to tell ye now. Twould only make ye uneasy like, an' that wouldn't do no good. No, wait til the time comes. Though I'm jubous it would be better if ye would couple up an' leave."

"We won't."

"All right; stay ef ye like; I ain't goin' to say nethin' a'rin' it, am I? Not a bit. But look yer. I'm goin' to watch ye. When I holler, look out for danger."

"You'll let us know?"

"You bet ye. Old Ben Mifflin is old Ben Mifflin yet, an' he ain't goin' to stand by an' see wrong done to any one, not if he knows it. 'Specially a white human. I'm a'kin' of every one that risks his neck among the Black Hills. They will do it. These young men will come lyar, though I've warned them not, ag'in and ag'in. But since they do come, old Ben Mifflin is the'r gardeen. Who but he? Does ye see this yer rifle?"

"She's a beauty, Ben. Gosh! I wish I owned such a one."

"It's five year gone by when the boy ez set me that stick han's with me at old Laramie an' said me go out on the plains. Morris his name is; Lintey Morris. Always did true—a chap that it wouln't faze a man so much to lose his life for. Wal, I stood by him. I said if he stood by me. Last spring when I went to Laramie the chaps said to me 'Ben,' sez he, 'that's a packin' lyar for ye.' Now I thought a packin' was one of them steambats that run up an' down

the river, an' I told him I didn't want to go nowhar. 'You're mistaken,' sez he. 'Some one hez sent ye somethin'? An' he brung it out. That was a note from her, in her own hand-write, the gal that was with us in danger."

"Who's she?"

"Her name was Milly. A beauty, she was. Not sech a beauty ez the White Spirit, ye understand, 'cause she lays over any kin' I ever see. She wasn't proud like the White Spirit. But she used to call me father Ben, an' that took me, somehow. If I ever wish'd I had a darter truly, it were then. A lovable gal like that 'un makes a man feel queer."

"Ye've bin married, though."

"I guess so. My wife was a Crow. The Green Snake was her name. A lively critter, she was. I'll back her to make things lively fur any man. I've traveled round some, myself, an' I've tried to trade off that woman to any responsible human, but I kain't do it. She ain't a bad lookin' female, fur an' Injun, but Lord! When did any woman hev her tongue? Sa'd talk a peaceable man stone-blind in half a year's time. I've been lookin' round fur a deaf man that would like to tackle her. A deaf 'un would be a good joke on her, I'd bet."

"So 'twould," said Jeff, laughing.

"I tried to sell her to Jan Schneider onc't," said Ben with a sly glance at the immovable figure of the Dutchman who stood leaning on his rifle during the conversation, an' making no attempt to join in it. "I told him about her, an' blame my eyes if he'd give a knife fur her—just a common buck-horn han'led butcher-knife. He was a queer 'un. Never knew Jan, did ye, Jeff?"

"Never," said Jeff. "I were speakin' to this man 'bout him a minit ago. His name is Yost Hoppen. Dutchy, this yer is Ben Millin, what I told ye about."

"How you do, Penn?" said Yost, calmly, an' with a smile which Jeff could not fathom. "I hope you poety well."

"Service to ye, Mister what's yer name. I'm comfortable enough. Hope yer poety peart. Ye make me think of Jan Schneider. Yer ez like ez two peas."

"Vere Jan now?" asked Yost.

"He ain't fur away," said Ben, with a sly wink. "Not

overly fur. I kin git him by a whistle, ef I'm minded to it. Wal, on't more, Jeff, look out fur yerself. Thar's them in these hills ain't overly fool of ye, an' mout be ye'll git into trouble. But ef the wust comes to the wust, yer party is all *men*, an' men ar' easier to handle than females."

"Won't ye come in an' see the boys? Thar's some among 'em would be glad to see ye. So would the gentleman. He was a-sayin' no later than day before yesterday that he would give money to hev you with us."

"Would he though?"

"You kin bet on it."

"Then I'm the'r man, sure. I'll go in an' see what they've got to say. Ef so be they keer to hev me, I'm open to make honest money any way I kin. I heern tell ye was mabal to take a carcajou. 'Tain't every one knows whar to find one. I does."

"Come along. Yer the man we want."

They entered the camp together, where Yost triumphantly produced the ears of the wolverine as an evidence that he would eat no more beaver. The simple faith and recklessness of Ben struck the hunters favorably and he was engaged to stay with the party while in that region. He claimed the right to go away for three days first, promising to come back at the end of that time. He left the camp just at dusk. Not long after Yost strolled out alone toward the riverside. An hour passed, and Jeff went to look for him. He searched high and low in vain. The Dutchman was gone.

CHAPTER VI.

A VISITOR.

THE surprise occasioned by the sudden departure of the Dutchman passed away after a day or so. Free trappers get used to these things, and they console themselves with the supposition that he had left behind the results of his trapping since they had come to the camp. Opening the cache with

the intention of dividing the spoil among themselves, their purpose changed. Every skin belonging to Yost had disappeared. He was honest enough, however, to refrain from touching any thing which did not belong to him. The traps which had been lent him by Jeff Rooter and the rest, were left where he had set them.

"He'll come back," said Jeff. "I ain't off'n fooled in a man. He'll be sure to come back; if he's gone away, he's gone for a good reason. Don't go back on him too soon. He don't look like a bad man; Ben Miflin said so."

"He went away soon after Ben did," said Daniel, musingly. "There may be something in it. Let us wait."

"Somebody coming," said the half-breed at this moment, raising his hand for silence.

The talking ceased, and every eye was turned toward the entrance to the cañon. The rapid beat of coming hoofs could be heard, and in a moment a white horse dashed into the valley, bearing upon his back the girl known as the White Spirit. She was looking over her shoulder in an attitude of fear, and Dan sprung into the saddle, closely followed by Jeff Rooter and the half-breed. Just then the heads of other horses appeared at the entrance of the cañon, and three Indians, with lances at rest, came on in pursuit of the flying girl.

Seeing the determined attitude assumed by the trappers and hunters, whom it was plain they had not expected to see, the Indians drew rein, and fled back over the path they had so lately traversed, at their best speed. By the time they had turned, Dan Crowley had reached the side of the girl, and laid his hand upon her left hand.

It seemed to him that she looked more beautiful to-day, flushed by the exercise of hard riding, than she had that day upon the mountain side. Her eyes were downcast before the bold orbs of the young man.

"You were in danger," he said. "I am glad you came upon us so luckily. You are safe here."

"I thank you, sir," she said. "You have indeed rendered me a service. But that my horse stumbled in coming up the pass, I should have escaped easily. But Gipsy sprained her ankle badly. You will allow me to proceed?"

"If you must hurry away, there is no man here who would

attempt to stop you—not even Jeff Rector, who was inclined to keep you as a hostage the other day. He will not do it again."

"No," said Jeff, "though I hold to it yet, that if we could keep her in the camp, we sh'd be safe."

"You know much of the secrets of the hills," she said. "But you do not know all. I should be a living, breathing calamity to you."

"Then don't stay," said Jeff. "Do ye know a man called Ben Millin?"

"I have seen him often. He saved me from death by the feet of a herd of buffaloes. I have much to thank him for."

"He is goin' to be one of our party in a day or two," said Jeff.

She looked at him angrily.

"It seems to me that every one I care for in the least will perish by getting himself into danger, simply to annoy me. Why have you entrapped that brave old man? He knows the danger better than any of you, and yet he will run his head into it, in this blind, reckless way. Why place me under obligations for which I feel that I must make a base return?"

"You have done no harm to any one here," said Dan.

"Have done. You know nothing of it. I wanted you all, as far as lay in my power; I would have saved you; but, what could I do when all were against me? My power extends only thus far: I can warn you: if you refuse to take the warning, be it on your own heads. But Ben Millin must come among you."

"In two days he will be here and take the lead of the party," said Dan. "I do not understand your warning. Is he not a worthy man?"

"None more so; and therefore I would save him," she replied.

"From what?"

"I have not the power to tell."

"Let it pass, then. Do you know the tribe of the Indians who pursued you just now?"

"Certainly; they were Crows."

"Might they not have been Blackfeet?"

"I do not fear Blackfeet; these were Crows," she answered.

Dan looked at the half-breed.

"White girl right," he said. "Crows; no Blackfeet."

"We shall be in danger from them," said Dan, huskily. "We thought ourselves safe from intrusion here; it seems that others know these passes as well as you, Jeff."

"I didn't think it," said Jeff, looking crestfallen. "Ben said that war more about then I thought far, an' he war right. I ain't sure we orter stay hyar, but now we've got in, don't let us be driv out by nobody."

"Why should you be obstinate?" said the girl. "I have kept your fate away from you longer than you think; I can not aid you much longer."

"Will you alight and eat? We were about to partake of food," said Dan.

"Thank you; I will do so; and I hope, too, before I go, to persuade you that this is no safe place for you."

"I am ready to listen to reason," said Dan, as he assisted her to alight.

"Which means, in plain English, that I am an unresponsible female," said the girl, accepting his hand in alighting. "Do not think so; I am in earnest in my desire to be of service to you."

"I do not doubt it," he said, bringing her near the fire. "Jeff, take care of the lady's horse, if you please. Give me that buffalo skin, Nat; now my saddle. There; that is as comfortable a seat as I can give you."

"Thanks again; you are only too kind to one who could kill you, but I do not. Do not put yourself to so great trouble on my account; I do not deserve it."

"Allow me to be judge of that," said Dan. "You are welcome to our camp, and we will do all we can to make your stay here a comfortable one. Our accommodations are not good, but such as they are, they are at your service."

"You are very kind, sir—too kind, indeed. It makes me feel the obligation all the more. Will you allow to it by asking one of your men to look at the horse? I am afraid he is badly hurt."

"Let me do it," said Jeff, starting up, hastily. "I'm an

out an' outer with a hoss; an' if any thing kin be done for the animile, I'm the boy to do it, you bet. I wish't Ben was hyar; he's the boss feller to take keer of a hoss."

"I know him well; and unworthly as I am, the old man idolized me," said the girl, softly. "Do you know that Trappin' Pea is my type of an honest man? He is brave to a fault, generous to a fallen foe, and faithful to a friend, even to the death."

"You speak well of him."

"Who speaks ill? All the world does not contain a nobler heart. Rough, to be sure, and rude of speech, but he has a heart which would do credit to a prince. I am sorry he is coming here."

"You are a riddle I can not read," said Dan, quickly. "Your vague warnings, while they may make us uneasy, can not drive us away. I am having rare sport here. Buffalo, deer and bear are the captives of my bow and spear. The men have a good supply of peltries, and when we kill a cou-
cajou I shall be ready to return."

"I hope you may kill one speedily, then," said the girl. "Do you not hear horses' feet?"

"Yes; they come this way."

As he spoke, the coming horsemen rounded the point of rocks and appeared in the valley. They were three in number, and were well armed and appointed. The horses they rode were of the mustang breed, strong-limbed and fleet-footed. Two of the new-comers were ordinary-looking fellows enough, dressed in hunter's garb. But, the man who rode in front was a remarkable person to meet in the backwoods. His frame was robust, and evidently hardened by fatigue and hardships. His face, which was almost featureless in its contour, was browned by exposure to the sun and wind of many climates. He wore no beard, but silken mustaches of the deepest black hung as low as the base of the neck, giving him a brigandish air. His dress was of dark-green cloth, carefully fitted to his person. A belt of black leather was slung about his waist, and held a beautiful pair of revolvers of the most approved make. His keen, dark eyes surveyed the camp at the fire for a moment, and then, signning to his companions to halt, he rode forward alone.

"Good day to all here, gentlemen. Ah, my dear Marian, I am glad to find you safe. Some one saw you go up the pass and directly after three Indians followed you. Were you pursued?"

"Yes. These gentlemen drove back the savages. Did you not meet them in the pass?"

"Doubtless they heard us coming and concealed themselves. My thanks are due these gentlemen for your rescue. Perhaps they will favor me with their names."

"I am called Daniel Crowley," said Dan, acting as spokesman. "The others are trappers and guides. This is Jeff Root r, this Nat Adams, this Indian Joe, and this Jim Arnold. Two of our party are absent. Ben Mifflin, and a German, Yost Hoppen by name."

"Yost Hoppen?"

"Yes."

"A new-comer in these hills," said the visitor. "At least, I never saw him."

"He has but lately arrived here," said Dan. "He left us somewhat abruptly."

"What sort of a fellow was he?"

Dan described the German. The eyes of the man brightened and he took off his cap and ran his fingers through his hair with a smile. As he did so, they saw that he wore his hair in short curls.

"I know who this is," said he. "Confound his impudence. Do you know who I think it is? He left about the same time with Ben Mifflin, did he not?"

"Soon after."

"Then it is Jen Schneider, the Dutch friend of Ben Mifflin. They are both tricky customers, but the Dutchman is the worst. And if you would believe me, when he came out on the plains, he was as perfect a specimen of the native Dutchman as you would wish to see."

"We thought of him so now," said Dan. "Confound him, I do! I like to trounce him. What could have been his object?"

"Puré devilry, and nothing else. People used to practice on him when he came out first, and he likes to return the compliment."

"Haw, haw!" roared Jeff. "You don't tell me the Dutch man foole^d us all? Belly for him. He ain't no skinch or he wouldn't be with Ben Mitlin, I allow. You ain't tell us your name, mister?"

"My name. Call me what you will. Any name will do," replied the other.

"Not preexactly so, mister. Dan Crowley hez been mighty free with our names. Stands to reason you other return the compliment. Let's hear?"

"I am called Conrad Vesey."

"Never mind what yer called. What's yer name?"

"I have given it."

"All right. Glad to see ye. Them men of yours out thar. Who be they?"

"Never mind that. They are trappers in my employ. Do you often exercise your questioning powers in that manner, Mr. Rooter?"

"Why?"

"I should not think it would pay you. I have seen a great deal of life, and I never knew a man to get very rich or very great by asking questions. I never did, up'n my word. For my part, I never answer any more than I think absolutely necessary for my own comfort and well-being."

"Close, ain't ye?" said Jeff.

"Rather," replied Conrad. "Now, Marin, if you are quite rested, I think we had better go."

"I had accept^d the invitation of these gentlemen to take some food."

"Do you need it?"

"Certainly I do. I have been riding all day."

"You ride too much for your own good, Mr. Marin," said Conrad, with a sharp, dark smile, which Dan did not like. "I think we must limit you somewhat."

"I will go now, Conrad," said Dan quickly. "Good-mornin', I thank you for what you have done. Is my horse fit to go, Mr. Rooter?"

"Course he is. He ain't hurt a bit. He got a gravel stone in his foot. I took it out, an' he's all right. He kin go."

"Thank you, Mr. Rooter."

Dan a bridle to assist her into the saddle. But Conrad kept to the ground and took his place between them in a manner which the girl thought rather odd.

"Excuse me," he said. "No man touches her hand but I. Allow me to aid you, Marian."

"You presume almost too much upon my good-nature, Conrad Verry. Mr. Crowley, may I ask your aid in mounting?"

Dan again came forward, and helped her to the saddle. The old man stood by, looking severely at her yet with tenderness. His color came and went in fluid flashes, and his eyes glowed like burning coals. She saw his anger and looked at him with a glance as high as his own.

"You know that I will make this a bitter thing to you, my dear girl!" he said, laughing in a short, fierce way.

"I know that you have the power, Conrad Verry. I know my power too."

"Not so well as you. And no one knows your power to reward for good or evil better than yourself. Beware of the course you take."

"Are you ready, sir?" she said.

"If you are."

"Then mount and I will follow. I have a few words to say to the gentleman, and then you to ride on. I will not detain you five minutes."

"I will not do it."

"You heard the lady request you to ride on," said Crowley, laying his hand upon the arm of the other. "Does she bids you?"

"And who gave you the power to command me?" said Conrad, throwing off his hat. "By the life of my body, you are bold! Man have I not before now, for half that you have done to me."

"I tell you to go and let the lady speak" said Dan, whose blood was thoroughly up.

"And if I do not go?"

"I will compel you to do it."

Conrad never removed his eye from the face of the speaker, thrust his hand into the breast of his coat and drew forth a silver bangle, which he made a movement to raise to

his lips. At the sight of the bugle, Maid Marian sprung from the saddle and seized him by the arm. He shook her off.

"Do not sound, Conrad. I pray you by every thing holy and pure which you once knew, by your patron saint, by the holy cross, by the name of your mother, do not sound!"

"I will. It is better to make an end of this at once. I have borne enough, and more than enough already. No man shall come and play Fernando to your Miranda, while I have the unpleasant *rôle* of Caliban. Let me alone. I will sound the call."

"You shall not."

"Then beg my pardon for the insult you have offered me but now."

"I was wrong, Conrad. I acknowledge it. See. I have dismounted. If you are ready, so am I. You may put me into the saddle."

He passed his arm about her waist, raised her from the ground, and placed her lightly in the saddle, with a glance of triumph at Dan. Then the party rode away together, without a word of farewell on her part.

"The durned hound," growled Jeff. "I'd like to put a bullet right through his pizen karki ge. What did he come from?"

"How can I tell?" said Dan. "What power has he over that sweet girl?"

"It beats me. He's a 'tarnal critter. He ought to be skinned," said Jim.

"Yer mighty right," said a voice close at hand.

"Yaw!" cried another.

CHAPTER VII.

IN PERIL.

THEY turned at the sound, and saw Ben Min standing near, with a smile upon his face, and, close beside him, the man they had known as Yost Hoppen.

"You are here, Ben. I am glad you have come. As for the person with you, I shall need some explanation of his conduct before I will consent to receive him among us," said Daniel.

"Very goot," said the German. "Vat you say mit me?"

"Did you give me your right name when we had you in the camp?"

"Nah," replied the other, with a broad grin. "My name ish Jan Schneider."

"Very well. What was your motive in trying to deceive us in that manner?"

"Yest vor vun," said Jan. "Penn dell's me to co unt git into the camp unt vind ous who you vas. I cooms auver here, but town py der rifer I makes believe I valis asleep. I never fees asleep at all; I vas in fun."

"You did not deceive us entirely; I suspected that you knew more than you showed upon the surface, and so did Jeff. You had no sinister motive, then?"

"I does vat Penn dell's me," said Jan. "Now I dell's you: I been mit Penn more ash fivif year. He goot mens; he help me goot many dimes ven I been in trouble. He save me vander Iljin come, he save me vrom der vasser, he save me in der voss, he tells me ous vrom der mut ven Shules Tamm. He saves me dere; unt ven he says 'Do dis,' I does it, yoos ash he says."

"That's the way of it," said Ben. "Don't you bother Jan. He's a good feller, an' will stand by you ez long ez I do. I set him on you my self an' he did just ez I told him. If I quit ye, so will he. I've tried to make the durned Dutchman understand that I ain't wuth a cent, but he won't believe it; he's so set in

his way, the contrary cuss. Don't say no more about it. When you talk of me, you must count in Jim along with me, for I ain't git rid of him, an' I don't know ez I want to."

"Dat ish dire, wat he says," said Jim. "I never know while I lives; he too goot to me."

"Let that go. Ye've had visitors, I see?" called Ben.

"Yes; did you see them?"

"Bet yer life I did: I wuz hid in the bushes, an' seen them all comin': an' ez true ez you live an' breathe, I think yed'd be yer cradd when ye put the gal on the less. Ye don't know the p'ison serpent ez well ez I do."

"To whom do you refer? The man call Central Vesey?"

"You bet; though he ain't got no more claim to that name than many another; he goes 'round a dozen; the Duke call him the Sweeping Eagle; I call him Central Vesey; his true name is Will Markman. The Duke's name ain't to be found on the piary. I know sum. Some call him Will the Wisp."

"Who and what is he?"

"He's a man that gits his money by robbin' fine people. When he kin do it without a fight he does that; but if there's any danger in leavin' em alive to talk, then they may catch him, and themselves dead an' be. He don't make no account of takin' a life of a feller when I do; I do it shudn't be seen. The blood on his hands is easier to sink an' cover up than he ain't got a grain of honesty in his dirty knifing. I know me the mudder because he's put it in her to be a good mudder. He's got a hard-scar face, and a quick an' bright. The world above him to make a living for it, but he won't. I would like to say how rich he is. He's got an' got lots of money, town along the river, to kill all the folks he wants, and then lay him in piles of money."

"Do you mean to tell me that the fellow lives out in robbery and murder?"

"Course he does. It ain't no sin to be a thief; all is fish that comes to his net; you clothes, an' all that, if you ain't got any thing. He hardly ever takes a camp until there's a place to break up; that's his natural gift, you see. He always has

till all the work is done, an' then he gobbles up the hulh party. Darn his pictur, he stole a lot of p'lis from me onc't upon a time, an' ef I git a chance at him I'll fix his fint eternally. I had half a mind to pull on him while he stood thar; ef it had 't a' been for the gal I'd 'a' done it."

"Who is she?"

"She's got a strange histry, lez that gal; she war found walkin' 'bout in the snow on the pray down thar, a gal th'at eight year old; she's nigh onto seventeen now, though she's got the courage of a man. Cornel Vesey found her, an' he bring her up. He's a man of fast rate eddication, an' he teach her every thing. She's apt to farm, an' so it needn't surprise ye that she knows so much. It was his kindness in takin' care of her that established a sort of claim on her."

"I see," said Dan; "and on the strength of this he has obtained a power over her. She is a noble girl."

"She's all that. She don't know the half his devilitries, though she knows he's bad enuf. I've hearn her beg of him to quit this life, an' toller some honorable imployment; but he won't; robbin' an' murker is just his strong suit, you understand, an' he ain't goin' to quit it just yet. He ain't rich enuff to suit him, though I can't see what he wants with any more. He hankers arter it."

"And this beautiful woman must pass her life in the society of such a man as that?" cried Dan. "It is horrible. Can nothing be done?"

"She would call it desertin' a friend to leave him now. He follerd her petishin', an' took her en her. She never knew her self in on the prary. I opine she was one of a party of emigrants, an' got strayed away somehow, or else the rest of the party got eat up, an' she ran away. 'Tain't nothin' fair. But whoever she is, a traver'ld don't live on the airth, or a hund'erd. Gosh! ain't she handsum?"

"She is indeed."

"She tries her best to save people; that's how the story of the White Spirit got about. She's usen to come by night an' try to warn men ag'in campin' by railroads. A many of 'em take warnin' an' quit. She wouldn't 'a' come to ye ag'in ef ye hadn't helped her out of the hands of Jeff Rooter. Don't ye took her ag'in, Jeff, or I'll be in yer woof."

"I ain't goin' ter," grumbled Jeff. "I didn't see any better way; an' I say yit, that ef we kill her, Vesey won't dare to strike at us."

"She shain't be hurted. I like the gal; she's been mighty kind to the old man. She told ye some say 't was my savin' her life. 'Twan't me; 'twas Jan. Don't you deny it; ef ye do, than ain't nobody hyar is gud to I have ye."

"Don't you go to lie on yourself, Pern M'kin," roared Jan. "You s'pose der young lady don't know who saved her? I tells you vat it is: off you dink you can put every ting off on me, den I lets you know ash I will not stand it. You sales der fraulein yourself: now den."

"I'll leave it out to the comp'ny," said Ben. "Shall get into the track of a herd of b'ller, an' Jan an' me see them a-comin'. We rode down to see the fun, an' while I took the bridle of her horse an' led him away, Jan shot a nail ball that was comin' at us full tilt."

"Liar! liar!" shouted Jan. "You runs right in der herd of pufaloes, unt dakes der girl eas; off course I shoots der pull. I shoots any pull ash dris to put me!"

"I have no doubt you did good service, both of you," said Dan. "The young lady spoke of it; but how is it that she can live among this party of rough and brutal men? For I take it that this scoundrel must have a large party with him."

"You bet. The roughs an' villains of the N'west jine him. He's got a camp in one of the valleys north of this, an' that they camp. Don't think their ain't no women there. Most of the men lez g' t wives of their own. That's every nation under the sun in that gang. A story could be wrig about 'em. They've built up a village, an' there they live. They ar' great chums with the Blackfeet, an' this Mountain man is the title of chief. When Whirling Breeze—that's a Blackfoot chief—ain't strong enough to do any job, he calls on Mountain to help him."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; an' ef you was to chawfally you, why, ten thousand calls in Whirling Breeze to help him. It didn't bett' be he don't dew it anyhow, 'cause he will kill ef he can, an' he'll want to moy it to the Blackfeet, 'cause the gal likes you, don't you know?"

"Do you think we are in danger of an attack?" said Dan.

"I should rather guess you *was*; no man ever insulted Will Markman *it*, that didn't git the wust of it. No, since! He'll be down on you like bricks. Bet yer life. He holds a grudge forever an' a day. I don't think I sh'd be above the soil of the gal ha'nt stood my friend. By the same token, I'd 'a' put a ball through his hide long ago, ef it hadn't been for *her*. So I guess we ar' nigh 'bout even."

"This is the strangest tale I ever heard. Why do not the trappers unite and put these scoundrels down?"

"They tried that onc't. But the briggle had hardly got together when the cusses vamoosed the ranche. When we got to the place we couldn't find hide nor hair of them. We han-kered round the place a week but it wasn't no use; they wouldn't come back. An' when we commenced to scatter they just give us tar. We lost a good many of our boys that trip. That's the'r best hold; cut an' come ag'in."

"Do you expect an attack soon?"

"Kain't say. We must git ready fer it. I know them. I've got a place up hyar a bit we kin fortyfy. We'll do it too, an' then let 'em come. That's enough talk. Jan, give us a song. An' ef anybody hyar hez got a flask of whisky, let him pass it over. I'm awful dry after so much talkin'."

"Vat I sings?" asked Jan.

"Any thing. I ain't particular. Now you keep still, all of you. That's whisky is it? Here's yer health."

Ben took the flask which Dan passed to him, and elevated the bottom at an angle of forty-five degrees. A musical gurgle followed.

Jan, who was about to commence his song, paused in the act and looked at Ben.

"Is dat whisky, Penn?" he said.

"The best you ever see," said Ben, applying the mouth of the flask to his own, and sucking vigorously.

"I can't p. leave ash dat is a vi ky," said Jen. "I never p. leave any tings unless I taste him."

"Take some," said Dan. "You are welcome, and perhaps you can sing the better if you have a drink."

"Yaw, I sings better," said Jan, eagerly. "Speak to Penn. He drinks him all."

Jeff Rooter seized the flask and drew it from the reluctant hand of the other, and passed it over to Jim. He took a hearty drink, drew a long, full breath, and walked at B. B.

" 'Tis very hard to tell, I know, but true."

But Jeff, who had been drinking whisky, snatched the bottle from his hand. By the time it had got to the round table there was a great yell in the upper part of the block.

"Now then, son," said Bill. "We ain't ready. Don't keep us waitin', yer."

Jan straightened up, and began to sing in English, with his irrepressible Dutch accent, which sent the whole camp in a roar.

The song being this, Letty would repeat the ridiculous German on the back and coax him to give them another. But he was not to be coaxed.

"What do you mean by that?" said I. "Do you mean that you are not satisfied with the way in which the law is administered?"

"Vy, you can do it by it. I. C. L. is with Mr. Avery. Decchman sings. It is good to sing. I am going to sing for a Decchman to sing. I am not a singer. I do know some times what they sing. P. S. You can sing. I will tell them unless she be trained for it. Now you have to sing and the man is singing now. I will tell them after you."

In order to get out of the way, Dan took a sentinel
and left, to which the German said, "I am
sure, for Dan had a very good time, and the German
awoke from his sleep, and said, "What is it, Dan?"
Dan replied, "I am sorry, but I have to go to
the German fatherland."

It was something to be told that the company had been in the
country for the third of June, and many, including Mr. W. H. Wad-
sworth, had been to see them.

"That's something the old man could do. Thank you, I've proved you right. I know what you want. Deal or die, we are all we have."

The two clasped hands across the fire. Their hair, brown faces were a little troubled. They had fought and worked side by side through many a weary year, and knew each other well.

"Yes, Penn—The Doochman you pick up in der peer saloon in St. Louis will stand by you, coom vat will."

"That's right, boys," said Dan. "Now, if you are ready, we will see this place which you think will do to fortify, Ben?"

The trapper rose and led the way up the stream. Every one else followed. They kept on for half a mile and reached a place where the stream widened and ran in two channels, leaving an island in the center—a rugged, irregular little place covered with rocks and loose slate.

"Why," said Dan, "we can make a fortress of that."

"That's what I thort," said Ben, quietly. "We kin try it, anyhow."

CHAPTER VIII.

LOOK SHARP!

THEY set to work in good earnest. Before three days had passed they had finished their fortification. It extended round three sides of the little place. In the rear rose the high barrier of the mountain range, vast and high. The fortification they had built crossed the narrow pass in front at a place where, defended by three or four resolute men, an army might have been kept at bay. Down the mountain it was almost impossible for enemies to come, for human feet had never trod that place. Dan looked with considerable admiration at the work, when finished.

"'Tis nice," said Ben. "I'm a dab at buildin' forts, I reckon. I've helped to build many a one in my time. So's Jan."

"Yaw," said Jan. "I helps Penn always."

"So ye bev, old boy. But the time I'll come to show what's in ye now, if ever. We shan't be left alone much

longer. I'm goin' out on a scout. You'd better come with me. The rest of ye stand to yer arms, an' if ye hear my rifle, then look out for danger."

The two scouts shouldered their rifles and marched away. They took a course down the mountain side. They had not gone half a mile when the thunder of coming hoofs caused them to look up, and they saw Mail Marin coming toward them at a hard gallop. She drew up the panting steed close beside them and asked, eagerly:

"Where are they?"

"I don't reckon I orter tell ye, my beauty," said Ben. "Yer in the service of the inf'my."

"Not willingly, Ben. You know that if I remain with them, it is because I believe that I can do good. And Carl is not so wicked when I am kind to him. I am under obligations to that man. He took me up, a little half-crazed, homeless wanderer, and gave me a welcome and a home. Since that time he has taught me, taught me, taught me, and I sought in every way to put me under obligations to him. He has done it. I can not repay him by his malice."

"But you know what he is," said Ben.

"True. I know he does wicked things. Crimes at which the heart grows sick are on his soul. I have seen many, but my time is nearly past. They are coming, and woe to these men in the camp. Turn back and warn them."

"And is 'Will o' the Wisp' comin'? Now may the black curse fall on him and all his kin!—ez a man. I ain't run back. 'Tain't no use to go on my farther, ez I say. But if you see 'Will o' the Wisp,' tell him this man from me. I've had a bullet moulded for him this mornin' a-hurting. I've got it now. An' ez sure ez he lives in a-somethin', I'll so sure I rub him out. He knows whar I kin hit, his ownself."

"Here they come," cried Mail Marin. "Aye!"

A confused trampling of hoofs followed shortly on the mountain path, and the next moment the Indians began to troop into the valley. They ran and scattered at the sight of the two scouts and their horses behind them. But Ben Millin was not the man to be taken easily. Running to Jan to follow, he dashed into an irregular path up the

Mountain side, known to but few. Before the horsemen had reached the spot where they had stood, they were half-way up the steep. Here they made a stand, and their enemies, fierce and savage as they were, dared not follow.

"Vy you no coems oop here?" shouted Jan. "Yoost dry i' water. Ve makes you veel pad off you do."

The wild band gathered at the mountain foot. Truly, as Ben had said, they were a motley group. There was hardly a nation under the sun unrepresented here. Indian, Negro, French, German, Spaniard, English, and half-breed rode round the mountain base, and shouted uncouth oaths at the two men perched upon the mountain side, laughing at them.

"Who is it?" said Corral, riding up at this moment. "Jasper Verton, do you know them?"

The man addressed as Jasper Verton was a pale-faced, sickly youth, who looked as if he had but lately left a college. Yet he was the most deliberate villain in the band, and was the second of "Will o' the Wisp" in his villainies.

"I know them very well," said Verton. "That scoundrel Marian and his Dutchman. I think it would be better for me to come in my way when I attempt to finish a fellow sinner. He would have been a dead man but for you."

"Marian took his part."

"So. And when Marian takes the part of any one it is well known that they are safe. Shall we follow those rascals? They are laughing at us."

"Follow the devil! How could Ben Miflin would laugh to see us dismount and begin to clamber up the rocks. They would kill us off, two at a time, before we could reach them. No. Let us on about the duty we have to perform. It will be all the easier that they are not of the party."

"Ben Miflin gave me a message for you, Conrad Vesey," said Marian.

"And what was it?"

"Say to Will o' the Wisp," he said, "that I have a bullet run for him, and if he gives me a shot at him I mean to rub him out."

A slight paleness showed itself in the face of the listener, but was gone in a moment. "The rogue dares to threaten me, then? I will make him sorry for that before many days."

Forward, boys. There is much spoil in the camp of the enemy, and it is ours."

Marian accompanied the band, and they rode into the deserted camp. On every side they saw evidences of a hasty departure. Broken traps were scattered here and there, thinkings-caps battered out of shape, pieces of furniture and a number of condemned skins of many kinds. But the birds had flitted.

"This is your work," said the leader, in a hoarse whisper, turning to Marian. "You have warned them to go away."

"Not I," said Marian. "At least not since the day you saw me here."

"I believe you lie."

"Lie!"

"I beg your pardon, Marian. I should not have said that. But you annoy me beyond description. I can't bear it. Now these people are gone, and who is to blame?"

"Maid Marian generally has her way in the end," said Verton. "She said you should do these people no wrong. Conrad, a word in your ear."

"No. I wish to speak with him," said Marian.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Marian, but what I have to say is of interest to the whole band. It will take me but a moment. Now, Conrad."

The two went aside together. Verton's face looked like that of Iago in conference with one of his fools.

"If you remember rightly," said he, "there is a young fellow among these hunters who is a handsome gallant, suited to a woman's eye. What if I were to tell you that it is for her sake she wishes to save these people?"

"It may be," said Conrad, beginning to flush. "She showed him great favor when I saw her here."

"Certainly. He knows the ways of the world and how to talk to an unsuspecting forest maid like this. His character is superior, and he is one of those thin young fellows used to take a woman's eye. Now you are rather a good-looking fellow, Conrad, but there is a little too much of the animal about you, and she has lived long enough here to know you exactly as you are. And you don't think that your life is the most enticing in the world?"

"Is that what you called me here to say?" said Conrad.

"Not at all. I called you here to inform you that the girl loves this Yankee fellow. I do not think she knows her own heart yet. But, I have read human nature too long and too deeply to be deceived in this. I tell you she loves him."

"If I thought that," began Conrad, laying his hand upon a knife, "as God is my judge I think I would kill her."

"None of that," said Verdon. "None of the hand would ever you do Mail Marian an injury. Revenge you will upon the man if you like, but do not touch the girl."

"What is that to you?" said Conrad, fiercely, half drawing the blade.

"Do not think to frighten me, Conrad Vesey. You ought to know me by this time. You shall not hurt the girl."

"Hurt her. As if I could! I tell you my life is bound up in hers. But why need it trouble you? Do you want her yourself?"

The sudden question startled Verdon, and nearly threw him off his balance, for he was conscious of this thought when the question was put. His first slight confusion over, he turned it off with a light laugh of derision.

"I! You know well enough that Marian would murder me if I dared to look at another woman. I meant this for a warning. Watch this young scoundrel well, for I believe he has to rob us of Mail Marian."

"The harebrained fool is enough; he may count himself a dead man, if I penetrate the camp myself and kill him. Let the Indians complete. Pick out eight or ten of the best scouts and search for the trail. I will go out alone and look for it. Be sure Marian does not leave the camp."

"If she will go, I do not think I can stop her," said Verdon.

"Let me speak a word with her before I go. If you find the trail, fire three guns; that will bring me back. Send Marian to me."

The girl came to him with downcast eyes. She did not know what he had to say, but partly guessed it.

"Marian," he said, "I am going to look for the camp of the Indians. Be assured that I shall find it. If I do, it remains with you to say what shall be the fate of its occupants."

"With me?"

"With you. It is a long time since I saw you first. You were a winning creature then, and I felt a thrill in a heart long dead to human sympathy, as I lifted you to the saddle before me and pressed you to my breast. I have seen you grow up like a bower; I have taught you, and seen your mind expand; my love has grown up with you, and I will be set at rest. You complain of the life I lead?"

"Yes, Conrad," she said, in a subdued tone, "I do."

"And you have good reason. I am willing to change this life, to sever forever from these wild associates, and go out into the world. I have wealth enough to make me welcome among men, for money, after all, is the power which moves the world."

"Ah, Conrad, if you would make this change!"

"Would you go with me?"

"Yes, Conrad."

"As my wife, I mean."

"No, no, no! as your sister. I love you in that way; I never can love you in any other. I will go with you to the world's end as your sister. I will love you always, but I can not marry you."

He staggered like a man half drunk, and leaned against his horse for support. It was a rough awakening from a long life-dream. All his hopes were scattered in a moment by those sad words.

"You do not love me then?"

"I am grateful to you, Conrad. You took me when a little child and made me what I am. In the midst of wilfulness, and doing it yourself, you taught me nothing but that which was good and pure. All that I am I owe to you. But I can not forget what you have been."

"I can change."

"Can you blot out the past? Can you make me forget how you acquired the wealth of which you boast? Conrad, let us go out together, with no wealth except our hands and our brains, give up this ill-gotten bower to the past, and make ourselves a new name on earth."

"Think what you do, Marian. This has been the hope of my life. For you I have toiled; for you I have sometimes even

stained my hands with blood. This gold—what did I care for it, except that you would some time share it with me. As for the world, this life is preferable, for the world so wronged me before I fled to the wilderness that I swore an oath to be avenged upon it. Change your purpose; say that you will be my wife."

"I can not do that."

"Then give me your reasons."

"I have given them."

"Then I will add another. This airy hunter, who saved your life, and who took you out of the hands of Jeff Rooter, has a warmer place in your heart than I have."

"At least, he never insulted me," said Marian, anguily.

"Indeed! Verton was right, then."

"Verton is a villain; I have told you again and again not to trust him; he will do you some great wrong yet."

"No fear of that."

"He will betray you; I know that he is a villain to the heart's core. He has lied about me, it seems."

"I think not. But let us say no more of this. I swear never to rest until this dastly hunter is in my power; and when he is—"

The expression of his face told the probable fate of Dan, if by any chance he fell into his enemy's hands. He flung himself into the saddle and rode away. At length he reached a place where a path mounted the side of the hill; there he tied his horse, and looking at the pistols in his belt, he saw that they were capped. His knife was in its sheath, and the hilt of a long-blade stiletto showed itself in the breast of his hunting-shirt. The path up which he climbed was an irregular one, and dangerous to unwary feet. But, he had suspected the place to which the party of hunters had gone, and knew that he could approach it in this way without being seen. He had just drawn himself up to a platform of rock from which he had a view of the camp, when a hand was laid upon his shoulder and a voice said:

"What do you want here?"

He started to his feet. Dan Crowley, the man he had hated from his soul, stood before him. At first his hand fell upon his knife, and then he mastered himself with an effort.

"Ah, it is you, sir," he said. "You startled me at first."

"You have not answered my question," repeated Dan. "I asked you what you wanted here."

"I might ask you the same."

"Certainly—you might; and I might give you an honest answer. But as my question came first, be so good as to answer it at once."

"'Sdeath! I have as much right here as you—a better, in fact."

"That is no answer to my question."

"Then my answer is, attend to your own affairs and let me attend to mine."

"That is speaking to the point; but, happily, I am attending to my business. Scoundrel, I know you! Thief, robber, and murderer; consort of Indians and half-breeds, you are in bad hands. Surrender, you disgrace to humanity! surrender, and thank my good-nature that I did not cut you down without question."

"I am glad this has come so soon," said Conrad, snatching a pistol from his belt and cocking it with his thumb. In his hurry, the cap fell from the tube. Before he could get at the other pistol, Dan got in a blow with his left hand, which sent the rascald staggering. It was only for a moment, and then they closed.

If Dan Crowley had calculated upon an easy victory over Conrad Vesey, he reckoned without his host. The moment he felt the grip of that strong arm about his waist, he knew there would be a fight for it. Each had got a knife out, but the knife-hand of each was inclosed in the grip of the other, and in this position they struggled for the thumb. Dan, an adept in every sort of violent exercise in the States, rarely met his equal at wrestling. But Conrad was truly his match. Up and down the flat rock they tramped, their eyes gleaming, their teeth clenched, and their breathing short and quick. Neither of them saw that Ben Miffin and Dan had come from the mountain side and were interested spectators of the struggle.

"I have you," said Dan.

"Wait," said Vesey. "You must win me before you wear me."

"I will do it soon."

"Then you must struggle for it," said Vesey. "I will make you pay the day you wrestled with me."

"You don't know me, Will o' the Wisp," replied Dan, putting forth all his powers. "Look out for yourself!"

They were well matched, but Dan, in making a feint, caught his foot in a projecting point of rock and staggered. Conrad threw his body forward to finish the struggle, but, by a dexterous slight, Dan turned him as they fell, and came down upon him.

"Good boy," shouted Ben. "That's right; stick the condemned critter. Stick him, Dan!"

But the wrist of Crowley's right hand was still encircled by the iron hand of Conrad.

"You have set your ruffians on me, coward," he hissed. "I'll die game."

"Rah," said Dan, freeing himself by an effort. "I take no unfair advantage."

Conrad was on his feet in a moment, and raising the knife above his head, made a tiger-like bound, and would have buried the steel in the unprotected bosom of his antagonist. The blow fell. But, Ben Mifflin's hand and eye never failed, and the knife was shivered into pieces against the silver-bound stock of the rifle, which he thrust between them. Then, whirling the rifle over his head, he knocked the ruffian senseless.

"There he lies, the condemned critter," he said. "Not the kind of an animal a man would like to meet without weapons. I'd like to finish the dirty hound."

"I hopes he deat," said Jan.

"I hope not," said Dan. "Thank you for your timely aid, Ben! It saved my life."

"I wouldn't 'a' claimed spilin' this yer rifle only for that," said Ben; "I hold it to be a sin to strike at one of God's creatures, with it just now. This yer thing deserved whooping, though. If he comes to life, an' you can't be lez a turn-up agin' him! Stick Karl an' deep, far he never will give you the second chance if he gits ye down. I kain't make it out. 'Tain't often a trapper holds a grizzly ag'in' another fer nothin'. He seems to hate you without reason."

"I tells you," said Jan; "it vas all pecasee of der young fraulein."

"The gal?"

"Yaw."

"The Dutchman is right, Dan. Blame my cats ef he ain't. Now don't thet beat all natur'? 'Tain't right; 'tain't Christian. Now an Injun, ef ye hurt him, allers rendah is it, till he kez yer skulp. But durn a white man that harbors such a sperrit. Don't say nothin' to him. Only keep cool, an' if it comes to blows ag'in, give him tar."

"He yoost like Shules Tamant," said Jan.

"Yes; an' Jules was a good chap till the Blackfeet cum. That reminds me that I expect Whirling Breeze out this way soon. He's a Blackfoot that don't owe me any good will. I helped 'car his company all to shivers ere day. He an' this devil hunt in couples; an' he's the blackest man of the two."

"What shall we do with this man?"

"Keep him; he'll be a hostage for the good conduct of the rest. If they come at us, we'll put him out in front of the stockade an' let him feel the bullets first. Give me that lariat, Jan."

The Dutchman obeyed, and he cut it into three pieces. One of these he tied about the arms of their captive near the elbows. The second about his waist, to drive him by, and the third was kept for his feet when they reached the camp.

"Git up," said he; "don't fool; you ain't hurt so bad but you kin stand."

"Will o' the Wisp" rose, sullenly. "What do you intend to do with me?" he said.

"You ar' my pris'ner," said Ben. "I'm jist as you men on some devilment. I won't be sure, but that is what I think. Tennyrate, I've got ye, an' I mean to keep ye safe. Keep an' eye on him, Jan, an' ef he goes to stir, shoot him through the head."

"I watch him like von cat," said Jan; "I know when yeel me."

"That's right. Don't. Now git on, you. Down that path."

Ben took the loose end of the lariat fastened about the waist

of the captive and drove him before him down the slope toward the camp. The inmates hailed their coming with wild shouts as they saw the captive. At the same moment Joe, who was on guard, shouted to some one who was coming to halt.

"I must come," replied a sweet voice, which Dan knew well. Joe started, and at the same moment the beautiful horse of Maid Marian cleared the low breastwork at a bound and stood before them. She started as she saw their prisoner and beckoned to Dan to come to her.

"What has he done?" she said.

"He attempted my life and we took him."

"Do you mean to harm him?"

"Not unless he attempts to escape."

"You took him in good time. The entire band are here, a hundred men in all; and they are searching high and low for you. I see you are prepared."

"They will have to fight for us," said Dan.

"Brave, but too rash. If they can not take you in that way, they can besiege you, and starve you out. Or they can call in three hundred Indians to aid them. Whirling Breeze and a large company of his braves will be here to-morrow. I pray you, if escape is possible to attempt it."

"How is it possible? No doubt they hold all the passes."

"You should have taken my advice before," she said; "I meant it honestly, and for your good. I come now to warn you to summon all your fortitude, and to fight bravely against the enemy, and save yourself if you can. I would ask you to surrender, but I fear you would not do that."

"You judge us rightly. What chance would we have of life if we yielded unless we join this band of professional murderers?"

"There is something else," she said, in a slightly tremulous voice. "I know my actions may, may, must seem unwise—"

"To me?"

"You would of course deny it. I would have you and all here judge me as leniently as you can. I was not born for this. To be a companion of savage men, without the pale of society, fugitives from justice, with the ban of the law upon

their guilty heads. But blind fortune has made me what I am, and I can not break the tie which binds me to them."

"Lady, will you hear me?"

"Let me finish. I am bound by a tie of gratitude to yonder man. I never knew until lately what he is. I did not believe it possible, for, savage as he is to his enemies, he is gentle to me."

"Are you his wife, lady?"

"*Her* wife? No, no; never that tie. I have not time to tell you now. It is enough that my fortunes are linked with his, and I can not forsake him. If I could turn him from this wicked life, it seems to me I would be willing to die. But good-bye. We may never meet again on earth, but I shall not forget you."

"Lady—"

"My name is Marian Delisle. Call me by my first name. I am Maid Marian to all the band."

"And Maid Marian of Sherwood Forest was not fairer than she of the Black Hills," said Dan.

"A truce. If I am Maid Marian, yonder man is not Robin Hood, nor are his followers such men as those in my Sherwood. You see I know the history of the world to whom you would compare us. Let that pass. I have bidden you good-bye."

"But not forever," cried Dan. "I will find you and know you better."

"No. Never, never more! Think of me at my best. When you are gone from this, think sometimes of the poor girl who would have been a better woman, if fate had not been too strong for her."

He would have detained her, but she turned her horse's head, and put him over the breastwork again. In passing she had dropped a small dagger, which he snatched from the ground and put into his bosom. As he ran he saw the blue eyes of the prisoner fixed upon him in suspicion and fury.

"Come here," he said.

Dan walked slowly to his side.

"Give up the dagger. Curse you, do you think you can keep any thing that belongs to her? I will have it, if you hide it in your heart, for there I will dig for it."

"Come, no heroes," said Dan. "I do not propose to give up the weapon. It is all I have as a remembrance of a woman whom you keep with you only by the strength of gratitude. You do not suppose she will fall in love with your character?"

"Give up the dagger, I say! Fool, honest, coward, liar! Under my hands, and let me cut it out here, in the midst of your hard bellies, and I will let you where you will never carry the heart of a foolish girl again. You devil! You know you have me fast, but a time may come."

"Silence, sir. I am not bold enough to fight you. We have you safe. The time for dicing has gone by."

"Yes; with cowards."

"The day may come when you will find whether I am a coward or not, sir. It does not matter. In the mean time, keep a civil tongue in your head, or you may chance to suffer by it. If you disturb the camp I will have you gashed."

"Dan," said Ben, "come byar."

The old trapper was standing on a point of rocks from which they had a view of the valley below. Dan hurried to his side. They could see the entire band gathered upon the plain, at the mouth of the pass, in conference. Just then Maid Marian joined them.

"They have found us," said Ben.

"So it seems. Ha! Do you see there?"

He pointed to the south. And there, filling into the valley, there was a band of warriors larger than the force of white men on the plain. The reinforcements had come ahead of time.

"Well, friend Dan. 'Tis Whistling Breeze. Now we are in for it. Look out for trouble to-day."

"Do you think they will attack us?"

"You bet. They won't do nothing else. Eternal goodness, but I didn't expect it! How many more? Swear to gracious God I don't think there's nigh two hundred of them."

The two parties met and exchanged greetings. These were hardly over when Verten detached himself from the company, with a white flag in his hand, and came up the pass. Ben at once left his elevated position, and taking his rifle, called to Dan to accompany him, and ran down to the

first barricade to meet the envoy. When Verton came in view, Ben was sitting on the top of the barricade, in the most nonchalant manner possible, with his rifle across his knees, smoking a pipe.

"Hello, you thar," said Ben, in rather a cavalier manner. "What ar' you arter?"

"We claim this ground."

"Go to Halifax. An' ef Halifax ain't warm enough, go to the devil's kitchen an' make his broth for him."

"You old ruffian, we did not come here to parley and bicker words with you. As leader of the Free Rangers I demand that you yield every thing in your camp—traps, guns, ammunition, pelts, and the like. You will be regarded as prisoners of war, and your lives spared."

"You don't tell me! Suppose we ain't call to the task of throwin' ourselves away that fashion? What then?"

"We shall come and take you. If we do, and you kill any of our men, you need expect no quarter."

"Dew tell! You'll come in yer best clothes, I s'pose, 'ca'se yer a captin', now that we've got the red coat. Are here as a guest? When will ye give us a call?"

"In a half-hour's time, you old fool, if you don't yield!"

"Jess so! jess so! Mister Brigadier. Bring yer little along; do, fur yer capt'in that used to be may want to dance a jig in the air."

"What do you mean?"

"He means," said Dan, stepping to Ben's side, "that we shall put a rope around your captain's neck and string him up on the first sign of your attempt to force an entrance to our camp."

"Is your name Crowley?"

"Yes."

"Then I have a message for you. You have seen Miss Marian. She says that while in the camp she dropped a cornelian ring, with a heart for a crest. I take it that you have the ring upon your little finger."

Dan drew off the ring. "Give it to the lady, with my compliments," said he. Verton went away.

"That was your own ring," said Ben, in some surprise. "She didn't lose no ring."

"No," said Dan. "She has my ring; I have her dagger."

"Good enough, an' ef you hev yer way, it will have her as well. I kin see that in your face."

Dan smiled, and the old man answered by a broad grin, as he hurried back to the camp and returned directly, accompanied by his prisoner Jan, who brought his rifle and ammunition.

Ben took a heavy hatchet in his hand and climbed a small tree which grew up close to the barricade. Once in the tree, he lopped off the twigs from a strong branch, leaving it in full view of the enemy as they came up the pass.

"Make a running noose in that lariat an' put it over that devil's head, Jan," said he.

Jan obeyed without a word.

"Now, toss it up hyar."

Jan did as directed. Up to this time Conrad had not spoken a word; but, as the rope was passed over the bough, he understood his danger.

"What are you going to do?" he gasped, beginning to be frightened.

"I reckon we are going to hang you ef yer friends down that pitch into us. Ketch the end of this lariat, Dan."

When this was done, Ben dropped down from his perch, and lifted the prisoner to the top of the barricade.

Not long, several horsemen appeared in the pass. Beholding the perilous position of the captain, they paused and uttered various exclamations.

"What do ye mean?" shouted one of the horsemen. "Let the capt'n down or ye want to live."

"We won't let him down, Tommy Turtle," cried Ben. "An' look you: you go back, every mother's son of you, or I'll push him off the barricade. Now git! Don't stay too long!"

"But I want to talk with you, Ben," said Tommy Turtle. "We don't mean you no harm; but we don't want the capt'n hurt neither. We ar' too fond of him. There ain't a man in yer party we've got any thing ag'in', unless it mout be one. The rest shan't be hurt. Ain't that so, Lieutenant Verton?"

"Certainly; no one shall be injured except that fellow Crowley."

"They are not ag'in' you, Dan," whispered Ben. "It's got to be a fight, sooner or later, for they have a great kin' for this skunk we've got yer, cuss him."

"I do not know why they hate me," said Dan.

"Because the capt'in hates ye. Verton pretends to, but I don't believe it. Come, Tommy," he continued, raising his voice, "that cock won't fight. We know you too well, we do. Once you git us into yer hands, ye've got us in m'ines, an' would forget all 'bout . . . you promised. Git 'way back!"

"Now look here, Ben, this won't do. You let the capt'in go; we must have him."

"We ain't safe ef he goes; we kain't do that. Ar' ye goin'? Ef ye be, all right; ef not, I push him off; an' I'll do it now ef Nat Summers don't put back the rifle he's tryin' to cock behind yer back!"

The man, who had been concealed in the attempt to get a shot at Ben on the sly, refined and the design with a supercilious look.

"The durned pup sees ever'ting," growled Tommy Turtle. "Don't try that on ag' . . . You can't fool the old man a cent's worth. What a man he would be if we could git him to jine us. I wish we only could. Capt'in?"

"What do you want, Turtle?"

"What kin we do? Give us orders."

"You must go back, boy," said Conrad. "If you can think of some plan to get me out of the clutches of these fellows, do it."

"An' bear this in mind," said he: "the first time we hear an alarm, I mean to shoot it . . . it through the heart."

"Good-by, capt'in," said Tommy. "We will try what we kin do."

As he spoke, the horsemen began to file out of the park. The present danger was over.

CHAPTER IX.
IN THE TOILS.

THEY took the prisoner inside the baricale and bound him to a tree. Night came on, and such a night as they have in early winter in the prairie land—clear and cold, with a bright moon. He complained bitterly of the uncomfortable place they gave him, and they took him into the little brush-hut which had been built, and tying him again, allowed him to lie down. Jan was placed on guard, and Ben paced up and down by the baricale, waiting for an attack, which he thought they might make in the night. Jan sat down in the doorway of the hut, and laid his rifle across his knees. This strange fellow had come into the prairie country an ignorant man in the ways of trapper and hunter too, but long companionship with Ben Mifflin had made him equal to the best. But then, he was gifted by nature with a good quantity of native shrewdness, which it only needed training to bring out. Under the fostering care of Ben he had become a practiced shot, and his great strength made him a hard enemy to meet in deadly conflict.

He had one fault, which he could never quite get over. He slept easily and heavily. If he sat down he was in danger of falling asleep at any moment. Ben knew this failing and kept an eye on him always. But to-night, bound as the prisoner was, he could not escape, he thought. Had he not told the knave this? But the most active men are sometimes deceived, and Ben found this to his cost before he imagined.

The trapper saw that Jan was likely to go to sleep and said to him to do so. Jan lay upon the ground not far from the prisoner, sleeping soundly. An hour dragged by, and Cawdron raised his head. He knew by the heavy breathing of the Dutchman that his son's were locked in slumber. The prisoner's feet were not bound, and rising to a sitting posture, he bent his head, and seizing with his teeth the hilt of a

knife which protruded from his breast, he drew it from its sheath and dropped it over his shoulder within reach of his hands. Taking it in his left hand, holding the point up, he managed to insinuate the point into the knot which Ben had tied. The blade was a keen one and the buckskin jerked with a slight noise. He fell back immediately, fearing that Jan would awake, but he did not. He lay there for ten minutes, although the knife had pierced him in the thigh as he fell backward and his blood was soaking into the ground as he lay.

Satisfied at length that all was safe, Conrad took off the lariat and thrust it into his pocket. He had no time to staunch the wound. Opening the breast of his coat, from a secret pocket in the back he took out a small case, containing two small bottles. From the smallest of these he took a stopper, and poured a little of the contents upon a handkerchief. This done, the unmistakable odor of chloroform began to spread through the tent. Rising to his knees, he crept to the side of Jan, and waved the handkerchief toward and near his nostrils for a while, without touching his face. When satisfied that the subtle drug had done its work sufficiently to prevent the easy awakening of the victim, he pressed the handkerchief lightly on his nostrils, and held it there for several moments. The work was done at last, and Jan lay helpless beneath his hand.

The eyes of the man began to gleam and he clutched his knife viciously. He would have liked to pierce it to the hilt in the bosom of the sleeping man. But, just as he half raised the knife, he heard the sound of another tent. Cursing the comer heartily, he crept to his place and lay down in the same position as before, but this time without him. The comer was Ben, who looked into the tent, and seeing the prisoner lying quietly on his back, concluded that he was asleep and did not disturb him. The most fear which haunted Conrad was that the old man would enter the camp and enter to find the comrade. He did not think it likely and if Ben had entered then his know all he would be in danger. But, he remained at the doorway a moment, looking smilingly into the face of the sleeping Jan, and then went back to his post. The moment he was gone the paroxysm crept

to the side of Dan who was sleeping close at hand and operated upon him in the same manner as upon Jan.

As far as these two were concerned he was free already. But, the old man outside was the man to be feared the most. He hurried to the side of the hut opposite the barricade, and cut out two heavy boards, leaving a passage large enough for him to emerge. He crept out cautiously.

Half an hour after Ben a man looked into the hut. Jan had fallen over on his back and was sleeping heavily. Dan was also asleep. But the prisoner was gone!

With a shout of rage, Ben sprang in and shook Jan roughly. The effect of the drug had nearly passed, but it was some moments before he was fully awake. The tumult Jan made aroused Dan, who started up.

"What is this?" he cried. "The prisoner gone?"

"Thanks to this durned Dutchman," growled Ben. "I meant I know'd he'd go to sleep. Don't you smell something queer?"

"Christ ma!" cried Dan. "We have been drugged."

"Put to sleep?"

"Yes."

"Pew," said Jan, "don't tell me dat der mans gits away before I go to sleep. I n'er drinks. I works poety hard k'ly, an' I p'seak p'fore I knows. Well, he gone. Cut off mine heat an' throw it out from der door. I no goot to do poety now."

"Don't do it too hard, old man. Yer to blame, but if the durned pup meant to die ye, I'd 'a' done it anyhow. What puzz'ls me is, how he got out of the hitch I put him in. They'll a' well call him 'Will o' the Wisp'!"

"It is gone. We may look for an attack now, since he is gone."

"Hark to that," said Ben, raising his hand for silence. A trumpet sound, which rung the valley from end to end, was heard in the distance, not far from his camp.

"It is—John! John is it?" said Ben. "That's whar he g'tones. He's took the Dutchman, climbed the mountains, an' went down the path wher' y' had the fight with him, to keep clear of this old man. Never mind. I'll k'ey him yit, before I go to grass!"

"I hope you may. Let us prepare for an attack. We need another man here. Let Jim go back for Julian José."

Jim ran off, eager to atone for the evil he had unwittingly done, and came back directly with the half-breed. They had hardly reached the barricade when a long gun was pointed in their way. He went down at the crack of Ben Kiff's rifle, while the stern old man began to kick off his place, without a smile or frown on his face.

"He bring it on his off," said he. "They won't come up so brash after that."

He was right. Awed by the fate which had overtaken their companion, those who followed him jolted and drew together. In this position they took the fire of the first twelve rifles. All were good shots, and the foremost man paid only for being in the full run. There was a backward movement, and at the same time Jeff Roper and the others came up on the run, eager to take part in the combat.

"Why did you come?" demanded Dan. "You would have done better to stay at camp."

"We wanted a hand in the fun," said Jeff Roper. "There ain't a man by ar that ain't got his mother, or this or another, by the hands of these same varmints. So don't drive us back; now don't."

"Stay, since you are here. Now, I tell you and don't to load the spare rifles for us. In that way we shall always keep two charges ready. When a man fires, give him another rifle. Get ready. They are gathering for a raid. Think fatime, they can only concentrate at a time."

Coating on with wild shreds, the rifles were loaded by the determined hands of the hunters, and again drawn by Dan. Several wounded men lay groaning in the grass. These were skinned out and a number of others had been killed to a considerable extent. --

"They are gone," said Clegg; "I should like to have that old pack Mammie in my hand. He is a good man. Ted Mammie not to go beyond the range of these rifles."

The brave girl was there, running from one wounded man to another, giving them drink from a canteen she carried in her hand. As fast as they fell, one of the men carried them to the shelter of the rocks and placed them in her hands.

Rough, bearded men, most of them ruffians and murderers, locked up in her face with a smile of thanks before they closed their eyes forever on the world. The combat was at its height. Shrieks, cries of agony or rage, and terrible battle-shouts, rang in her ears. She had been in scenes of battle before, but never in one where the fighters were as suddenly met as now.

She saw the tall form of Dan at times, raised above the others, his hands made ready to strike. His face, flushed with the ardor of battle, looked grand to her. She began to comprehend that she thought more of this man than she would care to show.

The fighters were crowding forward now, but were beaten back before the fast strides of the hunters. Comal whispered a low order in the ear of Jasper Verdon, and hurried away. From that time there was a lull in the battle for Indian land. A silence which had reigned for a few moments was suddenly broken by a tumultuous cry—a cry which made the woods ring. At the sound, to meet a band of nearly two hundred Indians, with Will of the Whipping Whirling Breeze at their head, *came down upon their rear!*

"Borne down by that vast multitude,

"—*Then their graves were first they stood!*"

As all fell in front of them, they stood bravely up to the work and fought with a spirit which was worthy of a warrior. It was vain. Tom Kilkenny, an Indian spy; Jim was desperately wounded by a bullet; Jeff Rexterley wounded on the soil; Dan, though rent in two pieces, still stood up.

But Jim and Dan, however gallantly they stood, were cut down, falling their clubs and rifles with steady hand, to the death, easily, speedily, by Dan. The multitude of the enemy came in upon them, and Dan was driven to the earth. Comal stood over him with a gesture of distress. Then came Dan, Gandy's son, in a state of perfect exhaustion. The boy was small, and could not stand upright; he fell to the floor, when Maturin darted under his feet and held him at the waist.

"This is all I have done, General Verdon! Have you sunk so low that you will slay a wounded man?"

He looked abashed.

"I was beaten by the battle," he said, sulkily. "I am glad you came between."

"Listen to me, Conrad. If one of these prisoners is harmed through your means, be sure of this: you will never see my face again."

"I have nothing to say in the matter, boy and my own vote. How many are killed? Where are the Diceman and Ben Mislin?"

"Fighting yet," she said, looking up. "Oh, save that brave old man."

History can show no braver deed than this. An old man, past his sixtieth year, and an ignorant German, standing up alone before the attack of nearly three hundred men. To be sure, the assailants fought at great disadvantage on account of the narrow pass. Just as the girl cried out to save them, the two went down under the determined efforts of their assailants. Half a dozen tomahawks were leveled at them, like a lithe young warbler, with a branch in his mouth, cared in between them and their leveled weapons.

"Back, warriors of the Blackfeet! Back, sons of the pale-face! No harm must be done to such brave men as these. The Panther, son of Whirling Breeze, has said it, and he will keep his word. These prisoners are mine!"

"Have your own way, Panther; we don't care for these two; they are in good hands," said Conrad. "But as they were taken by our red brothers. The rest of the prisoners are mine."

"It is well," said Whirling Breeze, the chief who led the Blackfeet. "My brother is just to the Indians."

They spent the rest of the day in collecting the traps and peltries scattered about. Jim and Ben looked on in silence, and noted that there was one cache which they had failed to find.

"It seems to me that there were more furs than this," said Conrad.

"You don't seem to remember that it's mighty late in the season, Mister man," said Ben. "We ain't trapsed so much ez hunted. We was hired to hunt."

"True," said Conrad. "It is not so strange, after all. I want to make a proposition to you, Ben. You see where you are situated. It will be next to impossible for you to get away from Whirling Breeze, and the probability is he will

roast you. Now, you are too old a man, and too brave a one, to be finished in that way. I want two such men as you and your companion in my band. I give you the opportunity of joining us. Whistling Breeze will do any thing for me."

"What would I be call'd on to do?" asked Ben.

"A little of every thing—much the same kind of work you have seen us do. It is paid well. In less than two years, if you are sober, you will have enough to make you comfortable. What do you say?"

"I say that you an' a dirty bunch, an' I wa'n't a pris'ner I'll last ye nigh in the seat I'm sayin' that to me. I jine a lot of thives an' murtherers that ain't fit to live on the face of the Earth. I make out of such a gang! Now, look yer: I've been a man all my life that tried to live my life out fa'r an' square. I'm a free-trappin'. I've made the broad prairies my home, and no man ever come to me an' said 'sech a thing about me. Go on! I don't want to look at ye. Ye ain't fit to live."

Conrad left him in a rage, and went out to the other side of the camp. There he saw a sight which nearly drove him mad. Dan had been so wounded as to be unable to walk, and was sitting under a tree; and near him, seated on a great stone, was Mall Moline. The eyes of Vandy dilated, and shot fire and flashes of fury. He made a few rapid strides and seized her by the shoulder.

"What do you mean, girl? Was it not enough that you followed him up and down with your accursed warnings and prophecies of danger, but must you play nurse to him in my camp? Away with you!"

"Take your hand from my shoulder, Conrad," she said, calmly.

He removed his hand.

"Go away at once, Malline; you know not what you do. I'll speak to you when you are sober. It will take but little time to make you sober, even I said so."

"I am not drunk. I will take care of this prisoner, and see that he is well treated. A woman, goaded by a bunch of wild, unfeeling men, Conrad! My gratitude for your kindness is lasting bound under the malignities you heap upon me."

"Will you come with me? I wish to talk with you," he said.

"Certainly. Any duty you can claim of me which a brother might have, I am ready to grant."

He led her apart from Dan, who had been looking with indignation during the interview.

"You think me harsh," said Veey, as they stood alone. "I do not design to be so. You know my heart, dear sir. When I love, it is with a power passing the love of women; and it is for your good I seek to separate you from this young man. What do you know of him?"

The new line of tactics rather disconcerted her. She was compelled to say that she knew nothing of Dan but what she had seen of him for the last three weeks.

"And is it just in you, Manan, to throw aside the passion of years for the love of one who may not care for you?"

"You assume too much, Conrad, when you say I would show love for one who made no return."

"Does it not show love to follow him in camp to camp; to warn him of danger at every opportunity, to stand watching from him?"

"Oh, Conrad!"

"Silence! You sent for his ring. You know it?"

"I did, Conrad, but—"

"You wear it still," he persisted.

"When I could find no time to get something from him for a keepsake, I believed honestly that I should never see his face again. I acknowledge that I care for him more than any other man, for he has saved my life."

"And did not I?"

"I have tried to repay you for that," he said. "I give you my confidence."

"Away with it. What do I care for that? I have had enough nonsense. Now listen to me. I have given you all these years for you, to be kind to. At this stage of the game, you will I be. Look to your life. Make your will, by fair means or foul."

"You begin to show your true colors, Conrad Veey. I will never be your wife."

"You shall, by beaven."

"We shall see. Not while I have strength to kill myself, or you. Beware of me. You have trained me up in your way of life, and we shall see whether or no I will do justice to your teachings."

"Do you think I fear you, girl? I am determined to make you mine. For the present, I leave you. But it will not be for long."

He walked hastily away. Directly after a man rose from the shelter of the rocks behind which he had been lying and walked toward her. It was the Lieutenant of Vesey, Jasper Verton. She heard his step and turned. There was a look upon his face which she did not like.

"And how is Maid Marian today?" he said. "We have done our work well here in the Black Hills."

"Too well, Jasper Verton. I am sorry for it," she said.

"Oh, their time has come. You remember the old saw, 'What will be, will be?' It was their fate to fall here, as it may be ours to die here or in another place. Can you spare me a moment of your company? I have something to say to you."

"Say on."

"You are short with me. To be plain, I have overheard your conversation with my worthy captain."

"Ah!"

"You are startled."

"So you are one of the kind to lie hid under the rocks and listen to a private conversation. I thought better of you than that."

"No doubt. We will not say in what manner I happened to overhear your conversation. It is enough for me that I do not hear it, and now tell you of it. If you have no great objection to the captain, I am glad of that. Now, I wish to be your friend, Miss Marian."

"I am willing to be friendly. But your manner of obtain-
ing information is not creditable, I assure you."

"Perhaps not. I wanted to say to you that if I can be of service to you I will be so. If you ask so much of me as to put you in danger, I will not, and I will do it."

"Who do you mean?"

"Vesey, 'Will o' the Wisp,' Markman, or what you

will. If you want him put out of the way, I am the man to do it."

"Put out of the way?" she said, bewildered. "What do you mean?"

"Put to sleep; sent down below; killed, in point of fact," said he, coolly. "The fellow has gone to the length of his rope. Rather put him out of sight, than have him here, an eyesore to you."

"Wretch!" she cried. "Do you come here with such a cold-blooded proposition as that? For what do you take me, rascal? Not only do I spurn your infamous proposition, but I think it no more than just to denounce you to Conrad."

"You would not do that, surely?" he laughed, turning pale. "I meant it for your good."

"How low I must have sunk in the eyes of all, if such a proposition as this can be made to me for my—! If the proposition to kill the man who has ruined me, would he might have left me to perish. If I had a weapon in my hand, I do not think you would live to insult another by such an offer."

"I beg your pardon," he said, humbly. "I was betrayed to this through too great zeal to do you service. I hope this may not be used to my discredit."

"Not if you truly repent."

"I do indeed. I was mad, Marian. I love you. The ground you tread is sacred to me. Let me tell you this—I love you."

"Silence! Do not go on. It seems to me that all the men in this camp are going mad together."

"May I not even tell my love?"

"It is hopeless."

The man stood with bent head, so that she could not see the savage depth of his eyes. In this position he remained but a moment, and then looked up. There was a touch of passion in his white face.

"That dream is over," he said. "You will speak but to me, I hope."

She did so, glad that he took it so easily. But she was mistaken. In that moment she had met an eye more fierce than even Conrad Vesey could be, for, though he looked

all who loved her, at least he never hated her. But Verton, who was of a vindictive nature, would have been glad to see her lying dead at his feet. He went away, and drew Conrad aside with a horrified face.

"I am afraid to speak it, Conrad. But, there is something you ought to know."

"Do not fear. Out with it, man."

"You will not be angry with me?" he said.

"No. Go on."

"A few moments ago I met Marian among the rocks yonder. She was very angry at something; that I could see in her face as I came up.

"Have you a mind to do me a service, Verton?" she said.

"Of course I told her yes.

"I will tell Conrad Vesey that I have some power in this camp," she said. "I told him so before, and he shall know it. Do you care for me enough to put him under the sod?"

"Simpler than that, Vesey. Who said that?"

"Marian Delisle."

"You must think me a fool, to come to me with a story like that," said Vesey.

"Then go your own way, Conrad Vesey. I thought to do you a service, but it seems you do not care for such."

"But what is this you impinge to Marian Delisle? It is terrible. I would believe you, for you have always been true to me; but Marian never liked you. Verton, will you swear by the Holy Cross that this is true?"

Verton readily took the oath. He would have sworn to any falsehood, in his hate of Marian.

"And so she is as far gone as that," muttered Conrad. "I love her, God knows how much. I doubt if this fellow whom she loves cares a pin's weight whether she lives or dies. I will punish her. Conrad Vesey will be true to himself, Verton?"

"My captain?"

"Will you be true to me in this business of mine? I must do something to repay this cruel girl in kind. Will you stand by me?"

"Through blood and fire. She will deny it, of course," said Verton.

"I shall not accuse her, I think. Let it work itself out. I am not myself to-day. Nelly is in a whirl. I think we will begin upon these two hunters. It would be a fine thing to burn them before her!"

"It would be better to burn the wounded fellow, Crowley. And perhaps this Jeff Rooter."

"This time will come. The two hunters are together in yester hut, I think?"

"Yes."

"Ben McCain refused to join us yesterday. Perhaps he will like it better at the stake."

With these words he turned back toward the hut in which Ben was confined.

CHAPTER X.

IN FOR IT!

BEN was half lying on the floor of the rude hut. He was not alone, for beside him, who sat near him, there stood the young warrior who had saved his life in yesterday's battle. The young chief was speaking.

"My father has done wrong," said the Panther. "Why did he not listen to the voice of the White Spirit, and go away?"

"We were going pretty soon," said Ben. "I am right sorry we waited so long."

"The eyes and ears of the Blackfeet are always open. They and the rest of their friends from afar and near. When I say, you is up you will my life. The Panther can not forget."

"I understand it. 'Twas at the time when Jim Doolittle was here."

"The Doolittle Ton-ta! Winding Branch is just. He will do what is right, and he will not be too hard upon the man who saved his son. But, he can not do a wrong to the great nation."

"My son speaks well," said Ben. "I am a wild and fierce

It matters not how soon I fall to the ground, an' am seen no
more. When do we leave this place?"

"The Doctor will go tomorrow. Good-by. Panther will see you again."

They fled off with away. Ben crawled to the foot of the hill to the Indian camp. He saw that it was nearly all sleeping, but the leaders of the Blackfeet are always awake at night. The chief sat plodding. A number of women were sitting around him, knitting here and there, laughing and talking with a considerate astonishment.

"I have seen such scenes in all my life," whispered Jim. "Dey make me sick. Dey will kill. Off dey go! and if I don't I won't make 'em start up."

"You don't see any women in this temple now, " said Ben. "Now that's a pity, 'cause I've seen women before now that could speak, whoo! If it let you run like the machinery of a water-mill, in a quartz-mill. " "Twa'n't very pleasant business, I didn't mind it, myself."

"I've got it straight," said Ben, "that my wife 'll turn up
any day now and go for me. I've been afraid of it a long
time. I guess I'm pretty safe now."

“Vy?”

... it was the first day that we in the morning. I kin
g of him, he is very fond of them."

"Nah, I'm not. I can't stand such dark ash
and smoke. Very unsatisfactory talking that
isn't it? I don't hear such things
any more."

in the same way. I like the
idea of a personal ID like
a credit card number.

"If you can't way; lef' yer own way. It don't make
no difference. You'll make just 2 good a fry. An' talkin'

of that, I shu'd think they'd be a'goin' up Northland? I mean here som'ers to build the fires. I judge it's half time to git to her it ready an' not waste time."

"Well, off I wash not till mit my hands out but I will smash you right square mit der mind. Dat is what I would do."

"No ye woul'ln't, Dat day," said Ben. "No ye woul'ln't. It's lucky for ye that I'm tired, or I would smash. Yes, I woull. Yes indeedy. Take care what ye say."

Nothing could quell the prizewin' spirit of the trapper. His eyes roamed over the grim faces of the Indians, in no disposition of finding one to whom a fight would be a pleasure. No doubt he could be accimilated in short order if required, but no time was given to get up the quarrel. The two men were hurried into a ledge again and bound. Half an hour after the ledge-curtain was hauled and Count Vandy appeared. He had thrown away his cap and was bare-headed, feather headdress, after the manner of a Dacotah. And Ben sat up on the ground with his back to the wall, looking defiance at the Indian. He raised his eyes and looked down on the two prizewin' with an expression of malignant pleasure. Neither of the Indians spoke.

"Good day, my very good friend," said Ben.

"Now see you," said Ben. "We don't want anythin' to say to you, Count Vandy. You better. You better not come to say what you did this mornin'. My hands are tied now, but cz sure cz you try too hard to save I take ye by the throat an' choke the life out of you when I get loose."

"Seemly! Do you threaten me? You don't know my power here."

"Yes I do. You kin have me tied up to you if you like. I know that right well. But you all done for. A man can only die once."

"I come to say to you that I'll not let you go to the torture. Pardon me if I'm wrong. He would help you if he could, but he's not likely to do it now all. You must burn."

"Let it come," said Ben, steadily. "I have faced death before."

"You are right. And to-day you shall look on it for the last time. Maid Marian shall stand by and see you die."

"You scoundrel! You have lived the life of a wolf, and like a wolf you will die. I do not fear you. If I must die, there ain't a man in the Black Hills more ready. Es for you, I've got a word to say."

"Say on."

"You are doin' this for the love of a woman. Yer a fool. That ain't the way to win a girl like Marian. Let her come; let her see my death, and she will go away hating you like death. I think she begins to hate you now."

"Silence!" shouted Ve-ey, "or I will cut you down where you stand."

"I won't be silent," said Ben.

Ve-ey drew a knife and rushed at the speaker. At this moment the Panther darted in and struck him down with a hatchet.

"Dog!" he shouted. "A Blackfoot woman would not strike a prisoner unless at the torture. What do you here?"

"Good blow!" said Ben. "Hit him ag'in. Now I've got the chance I mean to give him a piece of my mind. He's a low-lived, steaking purp. He ain't got no heart. A rattlesnake has more. I'll go my bottom dollar he kin squirm like a snake."

Carried sprung up. There was a red mark on his head from which the blood was trickling slowly to the ground. He took out a piece of cloth from his pocket and bound it tight at the wound. The blood soon changed the color of the cloth completely. He wiped it from time to time with his fingers and they became stained by the flowing tide. A more hideous picture is seldom seen. He stole out of the lodge like a bloody specter, leaving the Panther alone with the prisoners.

"Blood to the heart," he said. "My father loves me and will avenge me. I will save you if I can."

With a savage look for the last and for a few moments it was silent. Suddily after they were taken from the tent and again tied to trees Ben was passing quickly from side to side, when he heard a sharp cry and felt a pair of bony hands seize him. He turned with an exclamation of

surprise which changed to horror as he saw who it was. A middle-aged Indian woman, with a hooked nose, keen black eyes, and a shrill voice, was the person who had drawn his attention.

It was no other than his much-feared and long-neglected Indian spouse, the Green Snake!

Ben emitted one hoarse, shrill whistle of astonishment as he recognized her and struggled to free his arms from her grasp. But she had lost her white child too long to yield him easily.

"Gone long time, Strong Buffalo! Come back now. Glad to see you. Heart very sad disleng time. Weep tears of water."

"Dam my buttons ef it ain't the Green Snake!" cried poor Ben. "Git out. What d'ye want to me farr? I guess I've been away from ye long enough far ye to git another husband, ainst I?"

"No husband come," replied the Green Snake. "I fail to take away squaw of Strong Buffalo. He great child. Love his squaw. Come back, said I 'nother brave girl, said I 'nother brave. 'Nother brave no want. Git plenty wife he can. Let Green Snake be."

"I wish the Lord they hadn't been so fond as to talk about it," said Ben. "Come. Don't be so bold and impudent. I ain't used to it. Git out. What makes a feller go to warriors at the stake?"

"No burn. Green Snake go to Whirling Bear. Big husband's life. Never let him catch her say he to me."

"Don't do it," said Ben. "By jinks, I'll just have burnez not. 'Tain't much when you get used to it. Don't be no. It's fun; crack fun. A little fire an' a good cold water, go a great ways."

"No burn, tell you," persisted the Green Snake. "Save you, self. Go now to Whirling Bear."

Ben hesitated. Death it was probable to consider taking the Green Snake to get him in her clutches, but might not make use of her in getting him? He turned it over and told her to go away for the present and come to him in a half-hour. Green Snake came promptly at the time.

"How kom ye hyar?" demanded Ben. "When I left the Crows ye were that, all right?"

"We went out on a hunting party. Whirling Breeze killed all the braves and took us prisoners. I am a Blackfoot now. I hate the Crows. I love the Blackfeet. But husband no come till now."

"I'm in a poopy fix," muttered Ben, fairly sweating with agony. "Ef she gits me, I'm a ruined man forever. I must git clear of her somehow. An' at the same time—Green Snake?"

"Yes, Strong Buffalo. My ears are open."

"An' yer mouth too, most of the time," grumbled Ben. "Anyhow, come hyar. I want ye to go to Whirling Breeze an' claim me. Don't let up on him."

Green Snake started to go.

"Hold on," said Ben. "Wait a jiff. Let me run the matter over. I want to think of I've got any chance to git away after I've done the d—l. I don't propose to stay hyar with her, if I kin git away. But I'm afraid I'm a goner. 'Tisn't much to git brat. I believe I'll risk it."

"Dink off me, Penn," said Jan.

"Hold on!" said Ben. "I've got it. Say, Green Snake. Ye never rolls ed me much anyway. What woall ye think of that thar chap fer a husband?"

"Big brave," said Green Snake, nodding approvingly. "Good!"

"Mebbe y'd just ez li've change. Take Jan an' let them do what they dun please with me."

"Dat ain't fair!" shouted Jan, in mortal terror. "I never does dat so long as I lives. I not likes Injin voomans. Dake ter yourself."

"Don't be so bashful, Jan. Don't allow yer feelin' ag'in' me. I'm a friend of a good thing to influence ye. Think of the st'ke an' the fire, the arrers an' ball, an' take this blashin' knife to yer buzzin--an' ef ye don't wish y'd got a red-hot stove instid, I'll use my guess—oh, git out! Don't think on it. It's all right. Take her, my boy, an' take my blessin' with her."

"I never dikes no sooch voomans, I dikes I'd yoost as I've been do dat. No, dake her away. Vat! Didn't I deli' Kevine Schooner ach I voould marry her ven I cooms pack from her west?"

"That don't make any difference. Marry Katrice when ye go back. Melbe the Green Snake will let ye go. Melbe she won't. I judge it's more the last than the first."

"What I do?" said Green Snake. "Mas' hab husband somehow. If one, all right. If other, just as good. All same."

This accommodating proposition did not find favor in the eyes of Jan, who shrank from her approaches.

"It's to save yer life," said Ben.

"I don't cares nothings 'bout it. I don't want to save life. I won't haf her," shouted Jan.

"Ye hear him, Green Snake. Then go an' claim me. I s'pose I've got to do it."

The woman darted away, and shortly after they heard her assailing Whirling Breeze with all sorts of clamors and threats for the surrender of her husband. It may as well be known that the Green Snake was a sort of captain in the Indian village. They had taken her and did not know what to do with her. None of the braves wanted her for a wife on account of her bitter tongue, which no man could bear, and deter her from using it freely on all occasions. The arguments she advanced were conclusive to the Indian mind. Ben was her husband. There was no one to keep him back. Let him go free and there would be no other life in the village.

Whirling Breeze took her by the hand and led her to the tree to which the prisoners were bound, and bade her stand.

"Wife?" said Whirling Breeze in a whisper, looking intently at the Green Snake. Ben heard the name, and was about to commit himself, and finally said "yes" in a very faltered tone of voice.

"Husband?" said the chief, pointing to Ben.

"Yes," said the Green Snake, promptly.

Whirling Breeze cut the cords which bound him to the tree and thus addressed him: "You are a good man. While you remain with us and do not escape, you are safe. When you try to escape you will be captured, and we will kill you."

"What ar' ye goin' to do with me, friend?" said Ben.

"Big man, eh?"

"Yes."

"Let him be Blackfoot too, if he will. It is better than killing. My son loves the Strong Bull do well, and he hates Crows. Let Strong Bull do beware of him."

"I'll do that," said Ben. "Let my friend go."

The cat had cut the ears which bound the Dutchman, and he was at liberty. Crows saw the action with anger, but just then it was not his cue to interfere. He had not even attempted to avenge the blow the Panther had dealt him. That revenge was allowed to sleep for the present.

Ben was standing by himself, and Green Snake, at a little distance, endeavored to attract his attention. He paid no attention to the telegraphic signs she used, and she came near and snatched his ear. He jumped as if stung by a snake.

"O, I forgot. What the devil do you want?"

"Allah! Run away," she screamed. "I was the daughter of a Crow chief. Wanded fought for my hand. And I, who might have been the squaw of Big Head, chief of a Crow village, became your squaw. You are a coward!"

"O, shut up!" said Ben. "Ain't it enough that I allow ye to my wife, but ye must tell it to every one in camp? Git out!"

"O, snake in the grass!" yelled the hate female. "Dog of a dogger. The m—f—r never put a traps in your bones. You will cry like a little child. But! I spit at you!"

"Don't go on so, Snakey. Taint no use, I tell ye," said Ben.

"And where is there a wretched woman who has a husband who does not love her? Leave me, before I tear the eyes out from your head, and throw them to the dogs!"

"I know it," said Ben. "I know'd I couldn't stand this var. I never had it twice over, for sivin' up a good thing when I had it. But it would only last a little while, an' ye didn't let a cent on it. What of I should have to stay with her an' all! I'll be a dead man long before that time. Anyway, there's a chance. They'll let me go out on a half-breed hunt, and that's the chance of gittin' stung to death. That's a good way. I'll try that, if she gets too hard on me."

"All, wretched var that I am!" said the Green Snake.

"Oh, sad baby! The husband in whose bosom I must sit and make the timber-cards not farmed! He is as my eyes, he sees my tears, and he laughs! He is as his brother! He hates me?" Then changing her tone suddenly: "I will meet the eyes of the man who has insulted the daughter of a Canadian! Let me show you that I have the heat of a love in my bosom!"

And if Ban had not departed in hot haste, there is reason to believe she would have been as wild as her words. As it was, she attacked poor Jim, who could not get out of her way, and pulled out a double handful of hair.

"Ah-ha! wretched companion of the miserable man who does not love his wife!"

"Git on!" shouted Jim. "Vat's ratty vly man? I am not your husband. Dat is him vat is making you do. So help me god I wouldn't marry you off you was wif al arid 1 million tollars in money."

She made another dash at his hair, and Jim fled, his coat flying, following his companion. Two or three jaded Indian women, who saw the fracas, laughed heartily and showed their white teeth. Jim overtook Ban near the center of the camp, out of breath.

"I'd you'd ash see a fight as th' redskin you ash to marry dat voomin," said he. "Have I got any fur to get off mine heat?"

"Never mind, Jim; bear it today, and you may see us tomorrow dead. I've got no time. They Indians is pretty dead, but not so dead as to want no other prisoners. If we get to the fort, I'll see Dr. Crockett for you."

"I don't care for Dr. Crockett," said Jim, "but I care for him. And I tell you I don't care for him."

They had come to the fort, and Jim, who had been a trapper, had learned to help himself. He had a good gun, and he had a good knife, but that was all. What he did not know he did not eat, but that was a wise rule for a trapper to follow. He understood nothing; it was the old adage, "ignorance is bliss." He had been so long in the woods that he had almost perished. Dr. Crockett had followed him, and he had been dead. They passed stealthily through the dead and dying, and followed

creeping their way ear-filly without a sound. Ben took the lead, Jim came next, and Dan brought up the rear.

Ben knew the ground well, but that did not prevent meeting a mark. A leveled rifle met them, and a voice cried out to left. There was no time to dally, and Ben knocked the Indian down without scruple. Then, taking the lead of Paulie boy, he hurried on until they were fairly on the mountain side.

"Take your ease now," said Ben. "They ain't fools enough to foller us hyar."

"What do you propose to do? I must ask the question, for I will never leave this region until I have seen Matan again."

"Trust me," said Ben. "Ef I ain't mistaken, to-morrer night the Prairie Rangers will be swapt from the earth. Foller me."

CHAPTER XI.

A THUNDERBOLT AND A CALM.

A TERRIBLE confusion reigned in the camp of the robbers. The man who had been known as Dan sprang to his feet, yelling like a madman. The whole band, Indians and white, mingled, and beat in rage. The Indians were especially angry, but what was the cause of the Green Snake, when she found that her partner was dead and had given her the slip? Could it be that Whistler Breezy, with a full crew,

"Call, see the end of the to-isthiss, who fain had you to trust the old fox, Ben M'N. You take not even a promise from him that he would not attempt to escape; fully see the result."

"My brother does not like what I have done," said the White Bear. "How can he better it? His own partner is gone."

"Let Will of the Whips speak to a man who fears him not," said the Panther. "If our friends have escaped, is it any thing to him? Let him look to his own."

"You crow well, you chick-en," said Cuck, looking at the young chaff with a mirthful brow. "If I do not eat your

comb within a week, say that my knife is dull. I do not forget a blow."

"We will stay here no longer than the morning," said Whirling Breeze. "My brother is angry at those who are lords of the prairie. If he wants the help of the Blackfeet, let him come to them."

At early morning the chief gathered his band, took his share of the spoils, and rode away. Gaspard was not displeased to see him go. He had a plan in his head which the chief might have interfered with. The moment he was gone, he called to one of his desperados, a small, keen old man, evidently a Spaniard.

"Gaspard," he said, "take my horse and ride for yonder hill. Find the priest, Father Sala—you know where he is likely to be at this time. Bid him mount, and come to me without a moment's delay. Take a led horse with you, in case he should not have one; choose the best. Away! and see that you are back by four o'clock."

The man knew his master too well to hesitate. In five minutes he was speeding out of the pass, his horse galloping by the bridle. The leader snatched, and turned it back the side of the little *marquise* which was always carried with the band for the use of Maid Marian. She stood in the doorway. He laid his hand lightly on her arm, and led her into the *marquise*.

"So your lover is gone," he said. "It seems that he cared little for you, since he deserted you."

"Bitter I never looked upon his face again, than that he should remain in yours," she said.

"You are bold," he replied. "Then you do not say that you love the fellow."

"No; why should I deny it, even to you? He is at least a gentleman."

"It seems hard to me that Major D'Artagnan should sink so low as to love an Indian," he said. "He never told you that he loved you."

"That is false."

"When?"

"While I tended him, when I did."

"How events march rapidly, then! I see that I must be

hasty to secure my life. Marian Delisle, you are fallen low, even in my esteem. I will marry you, not because I love you as I did, but in pursuance of a vow. You conspired with Jasper Verton to take my life."

"I?"

"Yes! Do not deny it. He took an oath by all the holy saints that you proposed to kill my master—to 'put me under the sod'—those were the words. Oh, Marian, I loved you dearly, bad man as I am. But you shall be mine, and when we are married I will humble your proud head as low in the dust as you would have laid mine."

"Stop! You say that Jasper Verton swore that I proposed your murder."

"He swore it on the holy saints."

"Dare you set him before my face?"

"I dare."

"Then let it be done. From this, indeed, I will clear myself, whatever may be my after fate."

"I will call him."

He went to the door and called Jasper. He came in with a staggering step, and this hand in the bosom of his coat. He looked at the ground, for he failed to face the eyes of Marian.

"Jasper Verton," she said, "look at me."

"What do you want?" he said, without raising his head. "I can hear you."

"I am accused of a hideous crime of which you know I am not guilty. Dare you face me and say that lie is true?"

"I dare."

"Then look me in the face and say it. If you do, I will marry this man with all a murmur."

If she had waited for years for a test which he could not bear, she could never have had a sterner one. If she had asked him to swear upon the Bible that his story was true, he would have done it. If she had called the most horrible impiety as on his head if he spoke false, he would have uttered the truth. But, to say the words which would bind her to an curse! He could not do it. He remained with bowed head, and that steadily hand still in the bosom of his coat.

"What means this?" cried Comte; "have you lied to me Verton?"

"He proposed the murder himself, and still he loved me," cried Marian.

"Another?" cried Conrad. "Fool! Take your bath!"

The hand of Verton sprung from his bosom at the word and two pistols were leveled. Conrad's hand was on his pistol and Verton, shot through the head, fell dead. Marian ran to him his hand, but he was gone.

"I am sorry I spoke. Oh, Conrad, would have you?"

"I have killed a vile traitor. Touch him not. I am glad you are delivered from this stigma, my darling. I may be lover again. But, having sat for the priest, the marriage shall go on."

"It shall not," she said.

"It shall."

She laid a hand upon the forehead of the dead man.

"I swear by the blood you have shed so unmercifully, that I will die rather than be your wife, Conrad Verton."

"Then my purpose must be carried out. I have sent for Father Sola. You know him well enough to know that no protestations on your part will move him in any way. He will marry us, be a fool. Ho, there; come in, Gaspar!"

Six of the men who had been at the traps gathered to the door, but had not dared to enter, obeyed the summons.

"What has he done?" asked one.

"He attempted my life, and is a traitor to the king," said Conrad. "I will prove it in the next council. Take him out and bury him. Whatever wealth he has, I will be lavish of." The men took up the body and carried it out.

"Be ready at four o'clock. At that time you will be married," the sergeant said, and followed the men. Closing the door together, he told them to wait for the arrival of Verner, and sat down to wait for the coming of Gaspar and the priest. They were on hand half an hour before Verner, and he came to the captain. The priest was a thin, age-looking fellow, with a small face. He greeted Conrad with a light laugh, little unlike his gravity often.

"I can not speak to you now, Captain, but I must get the men in motion. Gaspar, go to Lieutenant Turin, and tell him to march at once."

The freebooters rode into the castle and were seen no more. At the same time the leader turned into the *marquée*, followed by the priest and Gaspard. Marian rose at their entrance, pale as death.

"You do not mean to carry out your hideous threat?" she said.

"I mean to marry you. That is enough for me."

"Do not so desecrate your priestly office, Father Sala. I do not wish to marry him. Surely you will not be a party to this business?"

"You are angry now," said the priest. "And you are foolish. I am under the orders of Captain Vesey."

General seized her hand. "Go on with the ceremony, priest."

In that desperate moment, she snatched a knife from his belt and struck at him. But Heaven preserved her from that blow. The point of the weapon struck the lift of his breast-plate and glanced off. Before she could repeat the blow he had her in his arms, pinioning her hands to her sides.

"Now, Sala. Go on. I will hold her."

She was crying out in frantic earnest for mercy, when the roar of rifles in the valley below broke upon their ears. It was followed by another volley, and then succeeded the sound of a general combat. General released the girl and darted from the room. In a moment he was in the saddle and dashing down the path. As he came into the open plain he counted them all. The "Trapping Bataille" had been met by Dan McRae and was now engaged in combat with his men. He saw that his battle-axes were broken, and flying in every direction, and that Dan, McRae, Jim and three other horsemen had separated themselves from the rest and were coming down the mountain a gallop. He turned back, and reached the spot where Marian stood.

"Run for your life, Sala. Up the mountain. You know where I am. The 'Trapping Bataille' has come and my men are scattered to the four winds."

He leaped from the saddle and caught Marian in his arms. She struggled, but she was powerless in his grasp. Just as he leaped on the animal, the three friends came into the pass and saw him. Leaping from their saddles, they gave chase. None

of them dared to fire, for fear they might injure Miss Marian. Ben did not run so fast as the others and kept his rifle ready. The pursued reached a place so steep that it was hard to put Marian up first. Before he had taken a step to follow, a rifle cracked. Conrad Vesey threw up his hands, and, uttering a terrible cry, fell into the canon by the side of which he had pursued his flight. The stream followed him and his body had borne it away.

"I told him so," muttered Ben. "His bullet was run long ago, an' now he's got it."

They found Marian panting on the rock above. Dan held her tenderly and carried her down to the camp. The combat in the valley was over and the Prairie Rangers existed only in name. The Trapping Brigade had fully recovered the slaugher of many an innocent.

They released Jeff Roster and Indian Joe, who had been placed upon mules, though wounded. They would not wait for Dan. In a few days Dan set out on his return. It is always easy, in a trapping brigade, to find men who are tired of the life before it is fairly commenced, and soon after he left, besides Jan and Ben rode back with them to the traps, upon the promise of a large sum of money from Dan. Jeff Roster received payment for what he had done, and remained with the brigade. Joe did the same.

Ben Mifflin went on to St. Louis. Dan would not consent to have a suitable outfit made for Marian, until they were married. He had no one to interfere in his choice of a wife. A few friends were witnesses at the wedding. Dan stood near the door helping Jan from the mule, and said, "Miss Marian wasn't a steamer?" And Jan said, "Yaw?"

That night the two got gloriously drunk in the bar upon one of "Yaweb Post," one of Jan's aliases. In a day or two the hunters would all of the day, and with a general good-bye to their friends went back to the Black Hills.

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